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Practical Discourses

UPON THE

PARABLES

OF OUR

Blessed Saviour.

WITH

Prayers annex'd to each Discourse.

By FRANCIS BRAGGE, B. D. Vicar of *Hitchin* in *Hertfordshire.*

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RBR
B813P

TO

The Most Reverend Father in God

THOMAS

Lord Arch-Bishop

OF

CANTERBURY.

May it please your Grace,

TO permit me once more to present You with this Little Book, and to Beg that You would Receive it with the same Goodness at *Lambeth*, that you were pleased to do at *Buckden*.

'Tis very much owing to the Countenance it had from Your Grace, that it met with so Favourable a Reception

at firſt, as to be Encourag'd to Appear again Abroad; And which Emboldens me to renew the Dedication of it to Your Grace: Tho' otherwiſe, I am ſenſible I ſhould have preſum'd too far, to deſire ſo Great a Patronage, for a Thing ſo Inconſiderable.

May God Almighty long continue Your Grace a Bleſſing to this Church; And may Your Clergy know how to Value the Happineſs of having ſo Excellent a Governour! And may the the Great Shepherd and Biſhop of our Souls give Your Grace the Reward of a Good and Faithful Servant at Laſt!

I am, with the Greateſt Reſpect,

My Lord,

Your Graces,

Much Oblig'd, and

Moſt Dutiful Servant,

Fr. Bragge.

THE

THE PREFACE.

THE Parables of our Saviour being full of Excellent Instruction, and in a Familiar way teaching the Greatest and most Necessary Truths; I thought it would be a very useful Undertaking to Discourse Practically upon them: And by explaining *them, and enforcing the Sense couch'd under them, to make them serviceable to the great Ends for which they were design'd: The engaging Men in a Hearty Love and Obedience to our Great Master Jesus, and in an Industrious Provision for the Happiness of the other World.*

But before I proceed to consider the Parables themselves, I think 'twill be convenient to give a Brief Account, why our Saviour so often spake in that Mystical *Manner to his Hearers? And 'tis a Question which his own Disciples ask'd him, after he had deliver'd his first Parable of a* Sower; *they came unto him and said,* Why speakest thou unto them in Parables? *Mat.* 13.10. *To this our Lord gives a double Answer in the* 11*th and following Verses, thus. I speak to the People in Parables,* because it is given to you, *that are true Believers and my faithful Disciples,* to know the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, *or of the Gospel*; but to them, *that is, as they are described in the* 15*th Verse,* whose Heart is waxed

Groſs *or Obdurate and Obſtinate*, and their Ears dull of hearing, and who have cloſed, *or willfully ſhut* their Eyes *againſt the Light and Truth that I manifeſt to the World*, leaſt at any time they ſhould ſee with their Eyes, and hear with their Ears, and underſtand with their Heart, and ſhould be Converted and I ſhould Heal them: *to ſuch as theſe, as very Unworthy of the Favour*, it is not given *to have the Myſteries of Religion* plainly *reveal'd to them but only* Myſtically, *and* Covertly *by way of* Parable. *That is, 'twas by way of* Puniſhment *for their Infidelity and Hardneſs of Heart, and Deſpiſing and Rejecting His former* Plainer *Diſcourſes on the Mount and in other places; and their Averſeneſs to believe in him notwithſtanding the* Miracles *he did, and Blaſphemous Attributing his caſting out a Devil from one poſſeſſed who was* Blind *and* Dumb, *to the Power of* Belzebub *the Prince of the* Devils: *'Twas by way of Puniſhment for this ſtrange* Obduracy *of theirs that he took upon him that more* Obſcure *way of Inſtructing them than he before had uſed; as a which new Practice of his, was a tacit Intimation of his* Diſpleaſure *againſt them, and did threaten a* Total *Concealment of thoſe glad Tidings from them which he came to bring unto the World, if they perſiſted in their Obſtinacy and Diſbelief.*

And this is manifeſt from the whole of what St. Matthew *records of our Lord's Diſcourſes* before *this 13th Chapter; which we find to be very* plain *and expreſſed in the* uſual *manner, till the Phariſees with Helliſh Malice would diſparage the*

great

great Miracle he wrought upon the poſſeſſed Man, *by aſcribing it to* Art-Magick *and the Power of the* Devil: *And from* that *Time, after Confounding that Objection, and ſharply reproving their* Perverſeneſs *and great Obſtinacy, he very frequently expreſs'd himſelf by way of* Parable *in his publick Diſcourſes, and afterwards in private explained all to his Diſciples: and he gives this reaſon for his ſo doing, ver.* 12. For whoſoever hath, to him ſhall be given, and he ſhall have more Abundance; but whoſoever hath not, from him ſhall be taken away even that he hath. *That is, He that upon my former* Plain *and* Open *Inſtructions hath Believed and Obeyed me, ſhall have ſtill more and more as plain Manifeſtations made to him of the Myſteries of the Goſpel: But hee that hath made no good Uſe of what was then ſo* clearly *made known to him, but continu'd ſtill Faithleſs and Obſtinate, ſhall for the Future be depriv'd of that full Light and* Sun-ſhine *of the Goſpel, and be afforded only ſome Obſcurer* Glimmerings *of it, and behold it as through a* Veil. *A Puniſhment this, had they underſtood it, very Great; and which was enough to cure them of their* Stubbornneſs, *and make them more ready to embrace that Heavenly Diſcipline before it was too* Late; *For that* Eclipſe *of that Glorious Light, was a certain fore-runner of that Eternal* Night *which was to follow, unleſs they ſpeedily Repented and Believ'd. And this ſhould be an Admonition to* us *likewiſe to Fear and Tremble and walk with the greateſt Circumſpection, leſt we fall after the ſame Example of* Unbelief *and Diſobedience; leſt we ſo long Reject*

that Light which is come into the World and prefer Darkneſs before it, as to become utterly unworthy of it, and it be quite hid from our Eyes, and outer Darkneſs at laſt become our Portion.

This is one *Reaſon our Lord gives of his ſpeaking to the People in* Parables; *it was by way of* Puniſhment, *and as an Expreſſion of his Diſpleaſure at their* hardned Infidelity.

There is another, *and that a very* Merciful *one, as reſpecting a ſort of People not* Maliciouſly *faulty as thoſe before mentioned, but chiefly to blame for* Heedleſs Inadvertency: *'tis thus expreſs'd,* v 13. *of this* 13 *ch.* Therefore ſpeak I to them in Parables, becauſe they ſeeing ſee not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they underſtand. *That is, becauſe his Plainer and more Common Diſcourſes were but little regarded by them, and not* conſider'd *and* attended *to as they ſhould be, but forgotten as ſoon as heard; therefore the more to engage their* Attention, *and induce them to look* cloſe *into and* dwell *longer upon what he ſaid, he put his Diſcourſes into a more* Myſtical *and uncommon Dreſs; that their deſire of underſtanding his* hidden *Meaning, might employ more of their Thoughts about it, and put them upon making a further enquiry than otherwiſe they would do, and by that means his Doctrine make a deeper Impreſſion upon their Minds and Memories. For Men are naturally deſirous of finding out* Myſteries *and* Hidden *Meanings, and more than ordinary Attentive to what is unuſual and out of the common road of talking, and will take* Pains *to diſcover what is under the Diſguiſe of a* Parable, *and*

be

be much more pleased and affected with the Discovery of such a hidden Treasure, *to which our Lord elsewhere resembles the Gospel) than if the same thing had been offer'd them at an easier Rate. And accordingly St.* Luke, *after he had recorded several of our Saviour's* Parables, *subjoyns that all the People were* very Attentive to hear him ; *and no Doubt but they were as Inquisitive to* Understand *what they had heard.*

And indeed, tho' this be a Mystical *way of Instruction, and hath something of* Obscurity *in it, yet as it may be manag'd, nothing can be more* Familiar, *or more suitable to the Capacities of the Meanest Auditors. For the vulgar sort are but little Receptive of* Abstracted *Notions, and Nice and Lofty Speculations , and* that *is most likely to take with them, which is cloathed in a Dress they have been well acquainted with, and Illustrated by some Material Representation : For by this means, a Truth which otherwise deliver'd they would either not Apprehend, or not* Consider *and Attend to ; being express'd by way of Resemblance to what they have been much used to, and understand very well, is presently entertain'd, and becomes Familiar and Easie to them, and they can as well remember and attend to it, as to other common Concerns of Life. And accordingly we find our Lord's Parables taken either from some common and known* Actions of Men, *such as of* a Husband-man sowing Corn in his Field, and the springing up of Weeds with the good Corn, *of a* Fisher throwing his Net into the Sea, *of a* Man looking for a lost Sheep, *and the* Extravagancies and Repentance

of

of a Prodigal Son, *and the like*; *or from some common* Accidents *and* Events, *such as of a* Treasure found that was hid in a Field, the Plentiful Product of a Man's Ground, *the Unfruitfulness of a Tree, the* Reckoning of a Master with his Servants, the Importunacy of a Poor Widow for Justice, *and such like. Relations of this Nature are easily* Remembred, *and People are Naturally apt to* listen *and* attend *to them, and the meanest Capacity can* understand *and* apprehend *them, and if well-manag'd, they make what is represented by them appear very* Lively *and* Affecting, *as if 'twere* Acted *before our Eyes, and by this means the Truths deliver'd under that Disguise insensibly Insinuate themselves, and work upon the Mind even before a Man is aware of it, or can set himself to make Resistance.*

And as these Parables of our Lord were drawn from the most Familiar *things, they were so* Apt *likewise, and so excellently* Manag'd, *and there was so great Analogy between the things represented and the Representations of them, that a little* Thought *and* Reflection *of even an ordinary Understanding, would discover what was hid under so thin a Veil: And accordingly we find several of our Saviour's Parables taken presently by the Auditors in their true and naked meaning, and no doubt but more were so than the Evangelists took notice of. But least they should not be apprehended aright, we find our Lord, when in Private, explaining them to his Disciples, and giving them command to* speak in the Light what he told them in Darkness;

Mat.

Mat. 10. 27. *and by this means, that Impression which the Parable made upon the* Fancy *and* Imagination *of the People at the first relation of it, would afterwards either by Mens own Interpretation, or the Apostles, have its due effect upon their* Understandings, Wills *and* Affections.

Besides this General Usefulness of Parables, there is one thing they are more peculiarly proper for, and that is Reproof; *which is a thing Men are most of all Impatient of, and that must be manag'd with great* Prudence *and* Nicety, *or it will do much more Harm than Good. If it be too Plain and Open and Severe, it often* Hardens *an Offender still more; and if it be too Cool and Lifeless, it loses its Force and makes no Impression.*

In an Effectual Reproof then, there must be sufficient Strength *and* Smartness, *and likewise so much* Privacy *and* Secrecy *in it, as may not exasperate the Man too much from a Sence of the great Shame and Ignominy that attends the laying* Open *his Faults to the World. Now Reproving by way of Parable does all this. There may be Strength and Smartness enough in it if it be well chosen and applied; and yet there is so much of a Disguise and Covering upon it, as makes it very Private, and not to grate so much upon that Tender Passion of* Shame, *as a more publick and barefac'd Reproof would do. 'Tis as one handsomely expresses it, like Lancing a Sore with the Lancet* wrapt up in a Sponge; *when under Pretence and shew of nothing but smooth and gentle Usage, the place is unexpectedly open'd and the Corruption let out; which the Patient would not have suffer'd to be done, if*

attempted

attempted Roughly and without that Stratagem. And there is a notable Instance of this Parabolical way of Reproving, mention'd 2 Sam. 12. *Upon* David's *Murder of* Uriah, *that he might enjoy his Wife without Disturbance, the Prophet* Nathan *was sent to Reprove him for it, and denounce Gods Great Displeasure against him: And that he might do this the more effectually, did not Flatly and Immediately tell him of his great Wickedness, but frames a Parable of a Rich Man that had great Flocks and Herds of his own, who yet to entertain his Guest, took the* Only little Ewe Lamb *of a* Poor Neighbour *of his, which he had bought and nourish'd up with great Tenderness and Pleasure; and dress'd it for the Man that was come to him.* And *David's* Anger, *the Story says,* was greatly kindled against the Man, and he said unto *Nathan,* as the Lord liveth the Man that hath done this thing shall surely die, and shall restore the Lamb Four-fold, because he did this thing, and because he had no Pity. *When the Prophet saw that his Design had so far taken effect, he immediately follows his Blow, takes Advantage of the Kings Displeasure, and makes the Application home,* Thou art the Man. *And this Mystical Reproof struck* David *so deep, that without making any Excuses, he presently confesses his Guilt, that he had sinned against the Lord; when 'tis very likely a Rougher and more Downright Reprimand would have exasperated the King into Rage and Impatience at his being so expos'd by the Prophet, rather than have melted him into so humble and pungent a Remorse as this.*

This

This Course then our Lord took, not without great Wisdom; and by Parables apt and well chosen and very expressive of his Meaning, reproved the Obstinacy, Hypocrisie, and other Vices of the Jews, who were Men Stubborn and Refractory, and Impatient of too open a Rebuke: Especially the Pharisees, *whose* Pride *and* Haughtiness, *and great Repute with the People, made them not able to endure any thing of* Reproof, *tho' wrap'd up in the Disguise of a* Parable, *much less when publick and open, and in plainer Terms. Tho' as to the* Pharisees, *when this milder way would not do, he more plainly and sharply rebuk'd and expos'd their Great Wickedness and Vile Hypocrisie.*

These are the Reasons why our Lord spake so much in Parables; *and 'twas a Course which many of the Greatest and Wisest Men had taken before him The Prophets in the Old Testament, and several of the Heathens, express'd their Instructions and Reproofs in such a Mystical manner, and by way of* Fable *or feigned Relation of some Action or Occurrence that bore Resemblance to what they would Inculcate; as is very evident to such as Converse with their Writings. Which Course, had it not been very Effectual to the Ends for which it was design'd, it would not have been so much in Reputation as it was; and if it was so effectual then, why may it not be so still; if not to frame* new Parables, *yet to explicate and inforce the Old? Especially those which our Lord, with admirable Wisdom and Judgment, made use of to reprove Vice by, and encourage a Sincere and Persevering Piety?*

The

The Truths that are couch'd under these Parabolical Expressions, *are of the greatest Importance, and such as it nearly concerns us to* attend to, *and Practice accordingly*; *and the manner of* expressing *them is such, as illustrates with great Advantage, and very movingly recommends them, and that in such a* Familiar *way, as fits them to all Capacities tho' never so Indifferent*; *and may be of great use to work upon the meaner sort, who I fear are too little apprehensive of what is delivered in more Abstracted Terms.*

I have therefore Practically consider'd the most, and most useful of our Saviour's Parables, *passing by those only that wholly relate to the Jews, and that Infant State of the Gospel, and can't without* Violence *be made Serviceable to the Improvement of Religion amongst* Christians, *especially* now *at this Distance from the Times wherein they were spoken. But of this sort there are but Three or Four*; *and the rest that are not Particularly Discoursed of, are* Co-incident *and of the same* Sense *with those that are. And I hope this may not be an* Unprofitable *Undertaking* thro' his Blessing who Alone can give the Increase; *to Advance whose Honour in promoting the Good of Souls they are made publick.*

I desire only that two things may be further observ'd: The one is, That these Discourses are on Purpose design'd to be Purely Practical, *as I have stil'd them in the Title Page, and as every Intelligent Reader will discern, when he finds me wave many Fair Opportunities of Controversie that lie in my way*; *and my Reason for so doing, I think, is very*

very sufficient, (viz.) *Because 'tis too Observable that the great Defect of Christians now-a-days is in their* Practice, *which yet is the* One thing Necessary. *The other is, that, According to the excellent Advice of* * Maimonides, *the Reader expect not* (Rationem & Applicationem omnium verborum & rerum in Parabola Contentarum ad Rem Significatam, *&c.*) *a Minute and Particular* 'Application *of every Word and Thing in a Para-* 'ble, *to the Sense that is couch'd under it; but be* 'contented *with a more General Explication of the* 'Sum *and* Scope *of it. For otherwise either the* 'main *Intention of the Parable will be quite lost,* 'or *at least the Mind will be tir'd in hunting af-* 'ter *an Explication of what cannot be explain'd;* 'and *nothing be the Result of such Fruitless Study,* 'but *that Empty Vexatious Disappointment, which* 'all *those Experience, who make it their endeavour* 'to *find out, or rather force from the Words of an* 'Author, *that which the Author himself never* 'dream'd *of. All therefore that a Man should* 'propose *to himself in the Explication of the great-* 'est *part of any Parable, is to find out what is* 'the *main Drift and Design of it; and what it is* 'which *the Author of it would Instruct Men in,* 'by *that Allegorical Scheme of Speech.*

* *More Nevochim* in the Preface.

But tho' this be Excellent Advice, and I have endeavour'd to observe it in the following Discourses; yet, where it could be done without unnatural Straining and Violence, *I have been very* Particular *in my Explication: And indeed, most of our Saviour's Parables are so aptly express'd in the*

Parts

Parts as well as in the Whole, that they not only will Bear but Require a Minute Application of the Allegory to that which is represented by it, and which receives a great Advantage from it; as may be observ'd in the Perusal of what is now offer'd to the Reader's View.

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PARABLE I.

Of the Sower that went forth to sow his seed.

Matth. xiij. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

Behold, a Sower went forth to sow.
And when he sowed, some Seeds fell by the Way-side, and the Fowls came and devoured them up.
Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much Earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of Earth:
And when the Sun was up, they were scorched, and because they had not Root they withered away.
And some fell among Thorns; and the Thorns sprung up and choaked them.
But other fell into good Ground, and brought forth Fruit; some an Hundred-Fold, some Sixty-Fold, some Thirty-Fold.

THIS Parable is very fitly placed *first*, as giving account of the *Causes* of Mens Fruitfulness or Unfruitfulness in Christianity; and consequently, shews what is to be *avoided*, and directs to what is to be *done*, in order to Mens being *better'd* by the Sermons of the Gospel: Which is a thing *first* of all to be

taken notice of, by such as would be *Christians indeed.*

Our Lord's *Interpretation* of this Parable, from a Collation of the Three Evangelists that record it, *Matth.* 13. 19. *Mark* 4. 14. *Luke* 8. 11. is this:

The *Seed* is the *Word of God*, or the Word of the Kingdom; that is, the Gospel, the Religion that Christ Jesus came to teach the World. When any one heareth this Word, and *understandeth* it not, then cometh the wicked one or Satan immediately, and catcheth away that which was sown in his Heart, lest he should *believe* and be *sav'd*; this is he who receiv'd Seed by *the Way-side.* But he that receiv'd the Seed into *rocky* or stony Places, is he that heareth the Word, and presently with *Joy* receiveth it, yet hath not *Root* in himself, and so endures or believes but for *a while*; for when *Tribulation or Persecution* ariseth because of the Word, he is soon offended or discouraged, and falls away in Time of Temptation. He also that receiv'd Seed among the *Thorns*, is he that heareth the Word, and goeth forth, and the *Cares* of *this* World, and the Deceitfulness of *Riches*, and the *Lusts* and *Pleasures* of this Life entring in, *choak* the Word, and it becometh *Unfruitful*, or at best bringeth no Fruit to *Perfection.* But, He that received Seed into the *good Ground*, is he that having heard the Word, *understandeth* or *considereth* it,

it, and receiveth and *keepeth* it in an *honeſt* and *good Heart*, and bringeth forth Fruit with *Patience*, according to his *Ability*, whether *Thirty*, *Sixty*, or an *Hundred Fold*.

From the Parable thus interpreted by its Divine Author, it appears, as was ſaid, that the Deſign of it is to ſhew what are the *Cauſes* of Mens improving or not improving under the preaching of the Goſpel; that ſo we may know what to *avoid*, and what to *embrace* and *endeavour after* in order to our being *fruitful* under thoſe Means of Inſtruction we enjoy.

We ſhall now conſider each Part of this Parable with its Interpretation.

The Firſt is, *Behold, a Sower went forth to ſow: And when he ſowed, ſome Seeds fell by the Wayes-ſide and were trodden down, and the Fowls of the Air came and devour'd them up:* The Interpretation is, that the *Seed* which is ſown is the *Word of God*, and when any one heareth this Word, and *underſtandeth* it not, then cometh the *Devil*, or the wicked one immediately, and catcheth away that which was ſown in his Heart, leſt he ſhould believe and be ſaved. This is he that receiv'd Seed by the Way-ſide, or this is that Seed which fell by the Way-ſide.

The Word of God is compared to *Seed*, becauſe of its *fructifying*, growing and encreaſing Nature; becauſe it hath in it an *Active* Principle, and will when ſown, (unleſs kill'd and made unfruitful by Accidental

Injuries) spring up into excellent Fruits and in great Abundance, to the *Glory* of *God*, and the nourishing, strengthening, nay, the *immortalizing* of *Men*; for of this Divine *Seed* consists that Heavenly *Bread*, *which whoso eateth of shall live for ever*. 'Tis this Seed that bringeth forth those Graces of Christianity, which keep up the *Divine Life* in the Soul; 'tis this that makes it grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge and Love of the best and noblest of Objects, our *Lord Jesus*: 'tis this that is its Preparation for Heaven, and an Earnest of that Immortal and Glorious Inheritance. For, wheresoever that Seed is sown, and springs up, and *brings forth Fruit unto Holiness, the End* most certainly *will be Everlasting Life*, Rom. 6. 22.

And this Word of God is not only, for these Reasons, compared to *Seed*, but to Seed *sown*: 'Tis not only *potentially* fruitful, but the Powers of it are now call'd forth into *Act*; 'tis *actually sown*, the Gospel is preach'd and made known to the World, its excellent Precepts are *openly* declar'd, and *planted* in Mens *Hearts*, by the Proposal of infinite Rewards and Punishments to such as *do* or do *not* obey and practise them. And, this Seed thus sown, is *water'd* with the Dews of Heaven, with the Distillations of the Divine Grace and Blessing, which are in sufficient Plenty afforded to every Man; so that God, the great *Husbandman*, is not wanting in any thing

thing that is neceſſary to the Flouriſhing and Encreaſe of that Seed, which he hath thus committed to their Hearts: And therefore he expects (and 'tis but reaſonable he ſhould) to ſee it grow and bring forth Fruit wherever 'tis planted; wherever the Word is preach'd he expects the Fruit of Righteouſneſs. The Seed is good, and moſt of all *agreeable* to the *Soil* wherein 'tis ſown (for *Religion* is the beſt *Reaſon*, and therefore moſt *natural* to a *reaſonable Soul*) and 'tis ſown in great *Plenty*; there is no ſcarcity of God's Word among us, and 'tis water'd ſufficiently with the Dew of Heaven, the Grace of God, which is not wanting to any Man that will receive it, and therefore at our Peril we muſt all be *fruitful*; none of us muſt appear before our great Lord *empty*, leſt the Puniſhment of *Barrenneſs* be our Portion, and we be burnt up with *unquenchable Fire*.

This Seed then, or the Word of God, being thus *actually ſown*, the Chriſtian Religion planted in the World, and all things done on *God's* Part, in order to its being *fruitful*, and which accordingly he expects it *ſhould* be; it highly concerns *us*, in the next Place, to take care that it *be* ſo, and that nothing make it otherwiſe.

That is, that, in the Firſt Place, it be not like Seed ſown or ſcatter'd by the *Way-ſide*, which is trodden down by the Feet of Men and Beaſts, or devoured by the Fowls of the

Air. We must not be thoughtless and *inconsiderate* after we have heard the Word, and suffer our Souls to be like a *High-way*, laid open and exposed to *all Comers*, to all sorts of wandring, useless and wicked Thoughts, which thronging in abundance, will trample down the Good Seed that was sown, that it shall never more appear, be no more thought of, or remembred by us. Nor must we leave it to the Mercy of the *Fowls of the Air*, the Devil and his Legions, who, like Birds of Prey, hover over us continually, and are always ready to catch away immediately those good Instructions instill'd into our Minds, lest they should grow into Faith and Salvation, and which they see lye scattered and unregarded by us, and *unobserved*, throw in their Places, the Seeds of Sin and Misery, which, like ill Weeds, will flourish any where and grow apace. Thus *heedless* of so great a Treasure must we by no means be, but by *recollection* of Thought, advert closely to the great Truths of the Gospel, and exclude all wandring and vain Imaginations, and carefully gather up those Notions of Religion which lye scattered in our Minds, and reduce them to some Order and Connexion, and infix them by Meditation still *deeper* in our Souls; and instead of a dry, barren and *common Way*, for all Temptations and Injections of the Devil, for numerous and vain and incoherent Phancies, we should

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by ſerious Attention to thoſe concerning Truths, that we have read or heard, make our Souls (as *Solomon* expreſſes it) *a Garden enclosed, a Spring ſhut up*, and *a Fountain ſealed*, Cant. 4. 12. And then no fear of the Seeds being trodden down or devour'd by the Fowls of the Air; but 'twill remain *rooted* and grounded in our Hearts, and *will bring forth its Fruit in its Seaſon.*

Secondly, We muſt take care that the Word be not like Seed ſown in *ſtony* and *rocky* Places, where there is no *Deepneſs of Earth*; leſt, it ſpring up too *haſtily*, and when the Sun is hot it be ſcorch'd and wither away becauſe it hath no *Root*. That is, as our Lord interprets it, we muſt be careful not only to *receive* the Word with Joy, and have an *extempore* ſuperficial Religion, and *believe* and *obey* only for a *while*; but likewiſe to *endure*, and not be offended or diſcouraged though Tribulation or Perſecution ariſe becauſe of the Word, nor to fall away in time of Temptation.

I doubt there are too many of theſe *Rocky* Hearers, that perhaps are well enough pleas'd to be handſomely told of their Duty, to hear a well-penn'd Sermon, and for the preſent readily aſſent to the Truth and Reaſonableneſs of what is diſcours'd to them; and believe it their Intereſt to live as becomes Chriſtians, and rejoyce at the News of being freed from the Tyranny of the Devil,

and their own unruly Lusts and Passions, *of being made Children and Heirs of God*, and *Coheirs with Christ of an Eternal Inheritance*, and that there are never-fading Crowns of Glory reserv'd for them in the highest Heavens; and are resolved to set about the Performance of that Duty immediately, which is so excellent in it self, and shall be so infinitely rewarded. And indeed, the Christian Religion is so highly reasonable in its own Nature, so conducive to the Comfort and Happiness even of *this* Life, and the sure Way to such endless Bliss hereafter, that it can't but be very pleasing in the *Theory*, to any Man of Sense and Reason.

But after all this, I fear there are too many Hearers, that like *Rocky* Places, have only a *Surface* of good Earth, and retain this good Affection to Religion but for a *while*, and at the bottom are impenetrable as a Rock, and will not suffer the good Seed to shoot so *deep* into their Hearts, and take so *firm* a Rooting as is necessary to its Fruitfulness and Increase.

Their Spring is quickly over, a *Blade* or a *Stalk* is the farthest Progress their Religion makes, and never arrives to the *full Corn in the Ear*; but when they meet with any Difficulty in the practice of it in it self, or any Opposition to it either *without* from *Men*, or from the Devils Temptations *within*; For want of Deepness of Earth and Moisture they fall and wither away. If there were

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nothing elſe for them to do but to *receive* the Promiſes, they would with Joy indeed give ear to the glorious Deſcriptions of the Happineſs of a Chriſtian : Nay, that Happineſs is ſo exceeding great, that *at preſent* they may very well be glad to hear of the *Way* to attain it, and for a ſpurt ſet chearfully about it, and a ſhallow *Cruſt* of Earth will be ſufficient to make ſome Shew and *Appearance* of Fruitfulneſs and Increaſe. But, unleſs the Heart be *throughly* plyable, and there be *Deepneſs* of Earth, an humble Senſe of the great Need we have that this Divine Seed ſhould take Root, and grow up in our Souls, and likewiſe the *Moiſture* of a ſincere *Repentance* for our former Barrenneſs and ſtony Hardneſs of Heart, the Word will take but ſhallow Rooting for all our ſuddain Raptures, and upon every Difficulty and Temptation be ready to languiſh and wither, eſpecially when the Heats of Perſecution ſtrike upon it ; and then, too often, the latter End is worſe than the Beginning, and the Men grow more hardned and inſenſible than ever.

Thoſe therefore that find themſelves of this *rocky* Temper, ſo difficult to be perſwaded to be Chriſtians indeed, ſo ready to look upon the *ſmooth* Side of Religion only, and pleaſe themſelves in the *Theory* of it, admire the *Promiſes* of Chriſtianity, but find *great Reſiſtance* in their Breaſts when the Word would

would take *deeper Root*, and they are exhorted to a still more and more excellent and fruitful *Piety* : These *Persons* are by all means to endeavour still more and more to *soften* their Hearts, and make them *pliable* to the Impressions of the Word of Life ; that it may sink *deep* into their Souls, and be fix'd there beyond the Danger of yielding to every Temptation, and withering when Adversity shall come. They must not boggle at any thing that appears to be their Duty, but be diligent and industrious in ridding their Minds of their former Evil Habits and Inclinations, and *inure* themselves to the Obedience of Christ ; not pretending Hardship or Impossibility when *He commands*, not endeavouring to *lessen* the Obligation of any of his Precepts, or shifting it from themselves, nor expecting Heaven upon easier Terms : But, *knowing* their Lord's Will, endeavour to *do* it in Sincerity, upon such Obedience only, through the Merits of Christ, hoping for the Promises.

And this Course, like good *Tillage* and *Manuring* of our Ground, will soon mollifie the Heart, and make it not only *superficially*, but *intirely Plyable* to the Word of God, receptive of its Impressions to the very *Bottom*, so that it shall *dwell in us richly*, and bring forth Fruit, not only in Times of Security and *Peace*, but even then when *Tribulation* shall arise because of the Word, and take

still

ſtill deeper Root, and bring forth greater Abundance, notwithſtanding all the Storms and Scorchings of Perſecution, or even a *fiery Tryal.*

Thirdly, In order to the Fruitfulneſs of the Word, we muſt be very careful that it be not like Seed that falleth among *Thorns*, leſt the Thorns ſpring up and choak it, ſo that it yield no Fruit. That is, that after the hearing of the Word we go not forth, and ſuffer the *Cares of this World*, and the Deceitfulneſs of *Riches*, and the *Luſts* and *Pleaſures* of this Life to enter in and choak the Word, and it become utterly *unfruitful*, or at leaſt, bring no Fruit to Perfection.

'Tis by a lamentable Experience, too true, that the Love of *this* World very much hinders our Proviſion for the *next*; and 'tis *as* true, that this is the greateſt *Folly and Madneſs* in Nature, becauſe the *World to come* is upon all Accounts, ſo infinitely to be preferr'd before the *preſent*, that there cannot be the leaſt Competition between them: For, how can a World of *Cares and Vexations, of Miſery and Affliction of all Sorts, of Hazards and Uncertainties, of Sickneſs, Pain and Death*, as *this* is, compare with a World of *eternal, unmix'd and uninterrupted Happineſs*, as is the *other*! And therefore, one would think Men ſhould be ſo *wiſe* and ſo much their *own Friends*, as to beſtow their greateſt Endeavours in purſuit of their main Intereſt; and not

not on the contrary such egregious Fools, as for the Gain of an *empty Bubble* to forfeit an *happy Eternity*.

So far as is consistent with the Care of the *Soul*, 'tis very allowable to mind the Affairs of *this Life*: Nay, 'tis a *Duty* of our Holy Religion for every Man to be industrious in his Calling, and to enjoy with Thanksgiving the Portion that God hath given him here below: But to *invert* God's Order, and place that First in our Esteem which should be *Last*; when he says, seek ye *First* the Kingdom of *God* and his *Righteousness*, and then all *needful* things of *this* World shall be added unto you, to run quite counter, and *First* provide for Abundance *here*, and *then* (and that but very coldly, God knows) think a little of the *Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*; this is such a prepostrous Course as can never end in any thing but *Shame and Confusion*.

If it be true, that the Gain of even the *whole World* would be a very unprofitable exchange when compared with the *Loss of the Soul*; and if it be true, that the Loss of the Soul will follow upon the Unfruitfulness of the Word of God, for Faith alone will not save, but must bring forth the Fruits of the Spirit: And finally, if it be true, that a too great Love and eager Prosecution of the things of this World will choak the Word of God, and make it unfruitful, as our Lord in this

this part of the Parable affirms it will: If all this be true, I ſee not how it can be avoided, but that ſuch as have a Deſire that the Word of God ſhould be fruitful in their Souls in order to the eternal *Salvation* of them, muſt love the World *leſs*, and their Souls *more*; muſt be careful in the *Firſt* place to *grow in Grace and be rich towards God*, and clear their Minds of theſe Worldly Thorns and Briars, leſt the Divine Life be ſtifled and that Seed choak'd which alone can fructifie to a happy Immortality. We muſt *uſe* this World, yet ſo as not to *abuſe* it; but certainly he *abuſes* it and all the Bleſſings that God affords him in it, who ſo immoderately *doats* upon it, as to prefer it before the Service of his great *Benefactor*, and ſpends moſt of his Thoughts and Endeavours about the encreaſing Wealth, and the Enjoyment of theſe ſublunary Pleaſures, and can ſpare but very little, if any of his Time and Pains, to prepare himſelf for the Enjoyment of God in Glory.

And yet, as plain as this is, Men are generally ſo little affected with it, as not only to neglect Religion as much as ever, and love the World ſtill more and more; but even to plead the *Cares* of the World as an *Excuſe* for their Coolneſs in Religion, and the Unfruitfulneſs of the Word of God in their Souls. We would be oftner at the Sacrament, and more conſtant at the Prayers of the

the Church, and in reading and meditating upon the Holy Scriptures, but that the Cares of the World, and the Hurry of Business, takes up most of our Time and Thoughts. But for God's sake, let such consider; is that an *Excuse*, which is it *self* as great a *Fault* as any? Will God accept such an Excuse at the Day of Judgment? Has he not plainly forewarn'd us of the Danger of too much worldly Mindedness? Has not St. *John* said plainly, *Love not the World nor the things of the World, for whoso loveth the World, the Love of the Father is not in him*, 1 John 2. 15. And our Lord as plainly, *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon?* How strange a Plea then is it for the Neglect of Religion, to say we are deeply engag'd in the pursuit of *this* World's Good!

If we believe we have Souls to be saved, methinks we should take care of *them* in the *First* place; and as for *this* World, a *moderate* Industry, such as does by no means intrench upon Religion, is all that can be justified. And what our Lord said to the Scribes and Pharisees about their taking care of lesser Matters, and neglecting the *weighty* things of the Law, should be our Rule in providing for our Families, and providing for our Souls. *These things ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone.* He that provides not for his own House, according to the Measures of Necessity and Moderation, is worse than an Infidel, 'tis true; but he that provides

vides not for his own *Soul*, is ſtill more unnaturally cruel.

Theſe are the things that our Bleſſed Lord ſayes make this Heavenly Seed, the Word of God, *unfruitful*; and therefore theſe ſhould with the greateſt Care and Application poſſible, be provided againſt; nothing being of ſo great Importance to us as the Flouriſhing and Encreaſe of the Word of God.

I come now to conſider the laſt Part of this Parable, *viz.* what it is that will make this holy Seed to *thrive*, and bring forth plentifully the Fruits of Righteouſneſs; and which Courſe conſequently, it highly concerns us all to take, that we may not be barren under the Means of Inſtruction that we enjoy.

Our Lord expreſſeth it thus: *But, other Seed fell into good Ground, and brought forth Fruit, ſome an Hundred-Fold, ſome Sixty, and ſome Thirty.* That is, he that receiv'd Seed into the *good* Ground, is he that having heard the Word *underſtandeth it, and receives and keeps it in an honeſt and good Heart, and brings forth Fruit with Patience according to his Ability, whether Thirty, Sixty or an Hundred-Fold.* In this Part of the Parable there are *Five* Things to be conſider'd.

Firſt, That the *good Ground* in which the Seed of the World will take deep Rooting, and bring forth Plentifully, is an honeſt and good Heart.

Secondly,

Secondly, That that which *infixes* the Seed of the Word in this good Ground, is *Consideration*, translated *understanding the Word.*

Thirdly, That the Seed so planted in this good Ground, must be diligently *kept* and *preserved* in it.

Fourthly, That we must expect the Encrease of it with *Patience*, and take care that the Fruits come to *Perfection*: And,

Lastly, That this Increase must be proportionable to the *Quantity* of the Seed that is sown, and to the Strength and Power of the *Soil* in which it is sown; that is, to every Man's *Ability*, and the Opportunities he has had of Improvement, whether Thirty, Sixty, or an Hundred-Fold.

First, The *good Ground*, in which the Seed of the Word will take deep Rooting, and bring forth plentifully, is an *honest and good Heart*; that is, a Heart sincerely desirous to be *inform'd* in its Duty, and that cordially *proposes* to *perform* it, and is truly *humble*, and of a *modest teachable* Temper.

St. *Paul* tells us, that *though he plants and Apollos water, yet 'tis God alone that giveth the Increase*, 1 Cor. 3. 5, 6. Now, can any Man imagine that God will make that effectual to our Good which we despise and value not, and force those Favours upon us, which we neither now *desire*, nor if we had them should do other than *neglect*? The Graces of Religion are too precious to be bestow'd upon such

such brutish Natures, and none but those that have Hearts earnestly *desirous* of his Divine Assistance, that they may be purified and renewed by his Blessed Spirit, and instructed in his Holy Will, that they may know how to pay a more acceptable Service to him; none but those that have such *honest* and *good* Hearts can expect the Word should flourish and grow fruitful, and they only that thus *hunger and thirst after Righteousness* shall be *filled*.

And this those would do well to consider, who frequent our Religious Assemblies in complyance to Custom only, and because their Neighbours do; or to learn new *Modes* and Dresses, or to shew their *own*; or to while away the Time that lies useless upon their Hands, or to meet a Friend, or please their Ears with some new Notion, or to gratifie their Curiosity, or the like: Let not such Persons be deceiv'd, God is not mock'd; let not such think they shall receive any Thing of God but the Fierceness of his Displeasure, for their prophaning to such vile Purposes what he intends as a Means to their Salvation. Those only shall receive *Advantage* by God's Word, that sincerely and earnestly desire its *Nourishment that they may grow thereby*.

This *honest and good Heart*, is likewise *Modest* and *Teachable*; and indeed, this Disposition is very necessary in order to the Fruitfulness of the Word.

For, Pride and Conceitedness are naturally the greatest Hinderers of Improvement in all Sorts of Acquirements whatever; but in Religion they do the most Mischief of all, and are the great Destroyers of whatever is religious and good.

For, besides that a high Opinion of ones own present Endowments cuts off all Endeavours of growing better, and renders all spiritual Advice *barren* to him that thinks he hath no need of it: Besides, that *Reproof* frets and inrages one that thinks *Commendations* rather belong to *him*; and Instruction, in Cases of Difficulty, is thrown away upon a Man that thinks himself Wiser than his Teachers: Besides these and several other *Natural* Ill Consequences of an over-weening Opinion of ones self, which might be mentioned, there is this yet above all, that it utterly bars and shuts out God's holy Spirit; it deprives the Soul of his gracious Influences, and diverts the Streams of his Grace and Benediction from watering our Hearts: For *Pride is an Abomination unto the Lord, Prov.* 16. 5. a thing that he hates and detests above all things: And St *James* tells us, that instead of *assisting*, God *resists the Proud*, Jam. 4. 7. who is his profess'd Enemy. And no wonder if that Soul be barren, which is thus *cursed of God*, and denyed those refreshing Dews of his Favour which alone can make it fruitful. Let us therefore lay our Foundation

tion *low* in *Modesty, Sincerity and Humility*, and God will build us up to Life everlasting. We shall then *be like Trees planted* and deep rooted *by the Rivers of Water, that bring forth their Fruit in their Season; our Leaf shall not wither, and whatsoever we do it shall prosper*, Psal. 1. 3.

Secondly, That which infixes the Seed of the Word in the good Ground of an honest and good Heart, is *Consideration* and *Meditation*, render'd in our Translation *understanding* the Word. The Word in the * Original signifies *weighing, pondering* and *considering*: And St. *James* says agreeably, whoso *looketh into* the perfect Law of Liberty, and continueth therein, that is, as the * Words in the Greek signifie, has look'd *close* and *dwelt* upon it by serious *Meditation*, he being not a forgetful Hearer, but a Doer of the *Work*, this Man shall be *blessed* in his doing, *Jam.* 1. 25

* συνιὼν.

* παρακύψας παραμείνας.

He therefore that desires the Word should encrease and multiply, must not only receive it in an honest and good Heart, but *infix* it there by serious *Consideration*; and be not like those compar'd to thorny Ground in the Parable, who, having heard the Word, go forth and think no more of it, but suffer the Cares, and Pleasures, and Riches of the World to enter immediately into their Minds, and choak the Word, so that it becomes unfruit-

ful: But by after-*Meditation* and *Recollection* of Thought make it sink still *deeper* into their Souls, and strike a Root to the very *Bottom* of their Hearts.

And indeed, without such *Consideration*, there can be very little Hope, if any, of its Fruitfulness. For, in all Learning, 'tis *Meditation* that gives a Root to what is read or heard, and fixes it deep in the Mind; 'tis that which makes it a Man's *own*, and serviceable to him upon occasion; and *without* it, the most accurate Discourse would tickle the Ear only, not inform the Understanding; and truly, the more *excellent*, the less *Beneficial*, unless it be weighed and examined by a serious and near Inspection.

Thus, the Doctrine of Christianity, tho' the most excellent in it self, as proceeding from the Divine *Word*, the Wisdom of the Father, is seldom embrac'd as such by Persons of a trifling *unthinking* Spirit, but rather appears harsh and unreasonable; or at best is but faintly approv'd of, and for a short Continuance. For, the Beauties of Holiness, like other chief Excellencies, are not to be clearly seen, and *fully* discover'd by a slight and cursory *Glance*, but by a diligent and curious *Search*; like *Gold*, that is not to be found upon the *Surface* of the Earth, but lies further in, and is treasured up within her *Bowels*. Wherefore, as we tender our Perseverance in the Faith and our Eternal Salvation, we must not

not think our Task is over when we have *heard* the Word, but always ſet ſome time apart (and the ſooner the better) to meditate and lay it to *Heart*, and frequently *revolve* it in our Minds, conſider it in all its *Relations* and *Tendencies*, its Nature, and its happy and glorious Effects; and then we ſhall be intirely ſatisfied that 'tis our moſt *reaſonable* Service, and above all things our Intereſt to practiſe its Divine Precepts, and that it flouriſh in our Souls, and bring forth Fruit in Abundance.

Thirdly, This Seed ſo planted and fixed in this good Ground, muſt be likewiſe diligently *kept* and *preſerved* in it.

Sloth and Idle Careleſneſs always have an ill Effect; and many hopeful beginnings are nipp'd and cruſh'd, and come to very deplorable concluſions, for want of that care and Induſtry, which was neceſſary to promote and further them to Perfection.

But above all they are moſt Dangerous in Religion. For beſides that they *Naturally* tend to make Virtue weak and degenerate; they give a fair Occaſion to our *great Enemy* to aſſault us, (that infernal Bird of Prey, who is ready immediately to catch away the good Seed, if unregarded, and throw his wicked Suggeſtions into their Place) and who is glad to find us thus weak and unarm'd, and careleſs of our Safety; and is too wiſe not to improve ſuch Opportunities to his beſt Advantage. And what Hopes, but we ſhall be

shamefully plundered of that Precious Seed which God has sowed in our Hearts that it may spring up to *Immortality*, when we are thus careless and negligent, and unable to make any great Resistance!

Therefore the Wise Man advises to keep the Heart with all *Diligence*, *Prov.* 4. 23. and St. *Peter*, to give all *Diligence* to add to our Faith Vertue, *&c.* 1 *Pet.* 1. 5. that *so* these good things may be in us and *abound*: And our Lord tells us, in the next Parable to this, that 'twas while Men *slept* that the Enemy came and sow'd Tares, *Matth.* 13. 25. Wherefore, *'awake* to Righteousness, says St. *Paul*, 1 *Cor.* 15. 34. be sober, be *vigilant*, says St. *Peter*, for your Adversary the Devil goeth about like a roaring Lyon, seeking whom he may devour, 1 *Pet.* 3. 8. Let us therefore endeavour, as St. *Paul* advises *Timothy*, 1 *Tim.* 6. 2. to *keep* that which is committed to our Trust, and to walk *circumspectly*, not as *Fools but as Wise*; *lest as the Serpent beguiled Eve through his Subtilty, so our Minds should be corrupted from the Simplicity that is in Christ*: We must be wise as Serpents as well as innocent as Doves; lest, when the Word has begun to thrive and prosper in our Souls, it be at length rooted out by the Temptations of that old Serpent, and bring no Fruit to Perfection.

Fourthly, We must expect the Encrease of this good Seed with *Patience* and *Perseverance*,

rance, and take care that the Fruits come to full Maturity.

We muſt expect the Increaſe of this good Seed with *Patience*, becauſe all Improvement is a thing of *Time*: Men can't arrive at Perfection, even in *Vice*, in an *inſtant*, much leſs in *Vertue*. There are many *intermedial* Steps and Advances to it; and as when Seed is ſown there firſt appears but a tender *Blade*, which, in proceſs of Time improves to a *Stalk*, which every day grows taller and ſtronger; and at length appears the *Ear* and the *Grain* in the Ear; and even after that compleat Formation of the Plant, there is yet ſome *conſiderable* Time before it comes to perfect *Ripeneſs*; and all this while the Husbandman waits with Patience till the Time comes of gathering the ripe Fruits of the Earth: So in Religion, there are *gradual Advances* to Perfection. The *Beginnings* of Religion, the firſt Sproutings of this Heavenly Seed are and will be tender and unconfirm'd, but Time will ſtrengthen and improve them; every Day will make ſome Advance to Perfection, where there is an honeſt and good Heart, and Sincerity at the Bottom: But theſe Advances may be very leiſurely, and like the Growth of Plants, ſcarce diſcernable in their *Progreſs*, and yet at length the Word of God brings forth its genuine Fruits in great Abundance. And this, though perhaps ſlow pace in Religion, muſt be born with *Patience*

and *Hope*; *for in due Time*, for all this, *we shall reap if we faint not.*

And this those should consider who expect to be *compleat* Christians in an *instant*, and are impatient of Delays, and disheartned by every Rub and Difficulty; and because their Practice can't keep pace with their too forward and passionate *Wishes* and *Desires*, are apt to despair of ever coming to that *Ripeness* of Christianity, which will fit them for their great Masters Garner; and too often let slip what they have already attain'd, and give over in much Dejection after they have made a very hopeful Progress. But this is a cunning Artifice of the Devil, and ought, with the greatest Care imaginable, to be provided against; and a Man's best Defence in this Case is *Patience*, or a calm and resign'd Expectation of Encrease and Blessing from God in his due Time, when we have done our own best Endeavour; *a waiting God's Leisure*, a confiding in his Goodness who only gives the Encrease. And (as St. *James* expresses it) *as the Husbandman waiteth for the precious Fruit of the Earth, and hath long Patience for it, until he receive the early and latter Rain*; so should we be also patient, and in Patience possess our Souls and establish our Hearts. For there is a *latter* Distillation of the Divine Grace as well as that which is *early* and at First; and which, when God pleases to afford, we shall then grow up to

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Perfection: And though ſometimes it may not be ſo plentifully ſhowr'd down as we could wiſh, yet will not be *finally* wanting in a ſufficient Degree, to ſuch as ſincerely embrace it and co-operate with it.

And as our Lord expreſſes it in another Parable, *Mark* 4. 26. (which, for its near Reſemblance to this and the next, I think it needleſs particularly to Diſcourſe of) *The Kingdom of God,* or of Grace, *is as if a Man ſhould caſt Seed into the Ground, and ſhould ſleep and riſe, Night and Day, and the Seed ſhould ſpring up and grow he knoweth not how, from the Blade to the Ear, and to the full Corn in the Ear; and when the Fruit is ripe, he putteth in the Sickle becauſe the Harveſt is come.* That is, tho' good Men's Progreſs in Religion oftentimes be not ſo quick and haſty as they may wiſh; yet, though almoſt inſenſibly, it may daily grow and increaſe, and at laſt the perfect Fruits of Righteouſneſs be viſible in their Converſations.

Therefore let not a ſlow Improvement diſcourage any Man, that is ſincerely deſirous of making ſtill *higher* Advances, but let him hold faſt what he already hath, do his beſt Endeavour ſtill to grow in Grace and the Fruits of the Spirit, and then with Patience wait upon God for a more plentiful Increaſe.

In the laſt place, this Increaſe of the Word muſt be proportionable to the *Quantity*

tity of the Seed that is sown, and to the *Strength* and Powers of the *Soil*, in which it is sown; that is, it must be according to every Man's *Ability*, and the *Opportunities* he hath had of Improvement; in some *Thirty*, in some *Sixty*, and in some an *Hundred-Fold*.

When a Husbandman sowes his Seed, if he sowes in great *Plenty* and upon *good* Ground, we know he expects to reap in a *proportionable Abundance*; and when he sowes more *sparingly*, and the Soil be not *capable* of so *great* an Increase, his Expectations are accordingly. And so it is in Religion; from such as are of *pregnant* Parts and Abilities, able to entertain and consider and make the best Use of the Word of God that is sown in their Hearts, and likewise enjoy the great Blessing of excellent Instruction, and have the whole of Christianity set before them in a true Light, all the Duties and Rewards and Punishments of it, so that there is all that can be done in order to an abundant Increase; from such Men as these, God will expect *much* Fruit, even the Increase of *an Hundred-Fold*; *they must abound* in every good Word and Work; and the Word of God dwelling so *richly* in them, Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept, Treasures of Instruction heap'd one upon another, a *scanty* penurious *Increase* will not be accepted, much less a Total and Intire *Barrenness* excus'd. For so St. *Paul*, Heb. 6. 7, 8. *The Earth that drinketh in the Rain that cometh oft*

oft upon it, and bringeth forth Herbs meet for them by whom it is dreſſed, receiveth Bleſſing from God; but that which beareth Thorns and Briars, is rejected, and nigh unto Curſing, whoſe End is to be burn'd. And our Lord in very plain and expreſs Terms ſays the ſame, *Luke* 12. 48. *Unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall much be required,* and *to whom Men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* But becauſe all Men are not of Abilities alike, nor have the ſame Opportunities of Inſtruction and Improvement; where there is any *Defect* either in the *ſowing* of the *Seed*, or in the *Capacity* of the *Soil*, God will proportionably abate in his Expectations of Increaſe. But, though he will not expect the *ſame Degree* of Increaſe from every Man, yet he will expect *ſome*; if not an *Hundred-Fold*, yet *Sixty*; or if not *Sixty*, yet at leaſt *Thirty*.

And, if this be true, in what a miſerable Condition are Myriads of the Hearers of the Word, who receive the Seed in great Plenty and Abundance, and are able likewiſe to bring forth a conſiderable Increaſe; and yet are as unfruitful as if their Souls had lain always *fallow*, and were never cultivated and impregnated by the Means of Spiritual Inſtruction! Let ſuch be entreated by the Love of God and their own immortal Souls, to look about them, and ſhake off that ſtupid Numneſs and Inſenſibility that ſo fatally beſets them, and bethink themſelves how ſad their Condition

dition will be, when at the great Harvest, the End of the World, when God will gather the ripe Fruits and dispose them in his Heavenly Garner; when at that great Day our Lord shall expect Fruit from the Seed that he hath sown upon their Hearts, and shall find nothing but Briars and Thorns, Wickedness and Impurity: Let them bethink themselves what a sad Condition they will be in, when their Unfruitfulness shall be punish'd with everlasting Burnings, and the Number and Sharpness of the Torments of Hell increas'd upon them, because when they *knew* their Lord's Will, they did not prepare themselves to do according to it.

Let them consider, that though God bears long with them, and frequently importunes them to a more serious Reflection upon their Ways, that they would *turn their Feet unto his Testimonies*, and be no longer *unprofitable Hearers, but Doers of his Word*; yet it will not be *always* so, there will be an End of this Day of Grace and Forbearance, and how soon God alone can tell; and perhaps this Discourse may be the last Invitation to a new Life, which some that hear it may ever have, or at least, the last that shall be attended with that Divine *Grace* and *Assistance* which alone can make it *fruitful*. Wherefore, *now while it is call'd to day, harden not your Hearts, lest God should swear in his Wrath, that you shall never enter into his Rest.*

Consider

Conſider what our Lord ſays upon this Account, in this of *Mat.* 13. 12. *Whoſoever hath, to him ſhall be given, and he ſhall have more Abundance; but whoſoever hath not, from him ſhall be taken away even that which he hath,* The plain Meaning of which is this, He that hath made good Uſe of the Grace he hath already receiv'd, and the Inſtructions he hath already heard, ſhall receive abundantly more Grace, far greater Aſſiſtances, and much larger and more frequent Showers of the Divine Bleſſing than ever formerly he did: Chriſt will come in to him and ſup with him, and he with *Him*, as 'tis expreſs'd, *Rev.* 3. 20. that is, will freely communicate to him of his Divine Favours and Refreſhments, and there ſhall be mutual Feſtivity and Joy between them; his Saviour will take him into the neareſt Relation to himſelf; for he hath told us, that *whoſoever ſhall do the Will of his Father which is in Heaven, the ſame is his Brother, and Siſter and Mother*; that is, as tenderly regarded by him as thoſe deareſt Relatives.

And, how muſt that Soul thrive and flouriſh which is thus plentifully water'd with Showers from above, and inrich'd with ſtreams iſſuing from the Fountain of Goodneſs! But on the contrary, How intollerable will be his Miſery that neglects and diſregards theſe Sermons of the Goſpel, and is not a Doer of the Word, but a careleſs Hearer only, deceiving, ſadly

sadly deceiving his own Soul! From him shall be taken away even that which he hath, he shall be deprived of it to inrich his industrious Brother and add to his Abundance. What Grace he had before shall be *with-drawn*, and he naked and defenseless, left to the Fury of his Spiritual Enemies; the Dews of Heaven shall no longer drop upon his *barren* Soul, but parch'd and sap less it shall be reserv'd to Eternal Burnings. Consider this, all ye that forget God, and are unfruitful under all his Care and Fatherly Nurture and Admonition; left at length he pluck you away and there be none to deliver you. And remember the words of *Solomon*, Prov. 29. 1. *He that being often reprov'd still hardneth his Neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without Remedy.*

And thus have I done with the first of our Saviours Parables, in which is set before us a Blessing and a Curse; a *Blessing*, if when the good Seed is sown, and we have heard the Word, we receive it into honest and good Hearts, and according to our several Abilities bring forth Fruit to Perfection; that is, Obey and Practise it with Constancy and Perseverance: And a *Curse*, if we remain still barren and unfruitful, not Doers of the Word but Hearers only, deceiving our selves into Eternal Perdition. It becomes us all therefore, to *take heed how we hear*; and not be like the *High-way side*, suffering our Thoughts to wander from the Instructions we have heard, and leaving

leaving the good Seed unregarded to the Mercy of the great Enemy of Souls; and expoſing our Minds as a common Tract to vain and wicked Fancies and Imaginations, and Diabolical Suggeſtions; nor like the *ſtony* Ground, impenetrable to any *deep* and laſting Impreſſions of the Word of Life; nor like that overrun with *Thornes* and *Briars* and *noxious Weeds* ſuch as are the *Cares* and *Deceitful Riches* and Pleaſures of this Life, which will choak the Word and render it unfruitful: But, that we treaſure up this Divine Word in our Memories, ponder and conſider it, and ſet our Love and Affections upon it. So ſhall it grow and proſper and bring forth Fruit, in ſome Thirty, in ſome Sixty, in ſome an Hundred-Fold; to the Honour and Glory of God, and the Eternal Salvation of our immortal Souls. Which, God of his infinite Mercy grant for Jeſus Chriſt his Sake.

Now, He that miniſtreth Seed to the Sower, 2. Cor. 9. 10. *both give us this Heavenly Bread for our Food, and multiply the Seed that is ſown, and encreaſe the Fruits of our Righteouſneſs; that being inrich'd in every good thing to all Bountifulneſs, there may be given through us, Thanksgiving unto God.* Amen, Amen.

THE

The PRAYER.

I.

MOST Holy Jesus, thou blessed Author of the best Religion, who hast in great Plenty sown among us the Seed of a happy Immortality, thy holy Word, and watered it with the Dew of thy Heavenly Grace, and art wanting in nothing on thy Part to cause it to flourish and bring forth abundantly the Fruits of Righteousness; I, thy unworthy Servant, unfeignedly bless this thy infinite Goodness, and tender Care for the Children of Men: but must with Shame confess, that hitherto thy Care has been in too great Measure defeated by my Inconsiderateness and Obstinacy. My Soul still remains barren as the High-way-side, impenetrable to the Sermons of the Gospel, or at best, flitting and unconstant in Religious Purposes, which have been short-liv'd as the Grass that grows upon the Top of the Rocks, or else choak'd with the Briars of Worldly Cares and Distractions, with covetous and sensual Desires. Thus have I courted Death in the Error of my Life! But now, being awaken'd by thy Mercy, and become sensible of the Danger I am in, and the sad Consequence if my Barrenness continues, I humbly beg, and earnestly at the Throne of Grace, that Thou, from whom is all our Sufficiency, wouldst aid me with thy Blessed Spirit, and help my Infirmities, and strengthen me mightily in the

the inner Man, that thy Word may ever hereafter take so deep a Rooting in my Soul, as to produce the genuine Fruits of Christianity.

II.

I am sadly sensible, O Lord, that the Heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? Do thou therefore, who art the Searcher of our Spirits, purge my Soul of all lurking Hypocrisie, and Pride, and Self-conceit, and every thing that will hinder the Growth and Increase of this Heavenly Seed; and make me apt to receive and cherish it, by creating in me an honest and good Heart, and renewing a sincere and right Spirit within me. Grant that I may so seriously attend to, and consider the great Truths thy Goodness hath revealed to us in the Gospel, as intirely to assent to them, and heartily endeavour to conform my Practice to my Belief; and may I always heedfully preserve those Divine Instructions, and moving Arguments to a persevering Piety, which I have learned from thy Word, lest the infernal Bird of Prey deprive me of the good Seed, and in its room plant devilish Affections. And, O that Patience and Hope, and an humble Dependance upon thee for Direction and Defence may be my Support in this my Pilgrimage! That so, chearfully running the Race that is set before me, and thankfully acknowledging the early Influences of thy Blessed Spirit in my tender Years, and waiting for the later Distillations of thy Grace,

which will bring my Fruit to Perfection, and always endeavouring to proportion my Increase to the Means and Opportunities of it, thy Goodness hath vouchsafed me; I may at last escape the Intolerable Punishment of Unfruitfulness, and having my Fruit unto Holiness, the End may be Everlasting Life, through thy Merits and Mercies, O Blessed Saviour Jesus. Amen.

PARA-

PARABLE II.
Of the Tares.

Matth. xiij. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30.

Another Parable put Jeſus forth unto them, ſaying, The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a Man that ſowed good Seed in his Field:
But while Men ſlept, his Enemy came and ſowed Tares among the Wheat, and went his way.
But when the Blade was ſprung up, and brought forth Fruit, then appeared the Tares alſo.
So the Servants of the Houſholder came and ſaid unto him, Sir, didſt not thou ſow good Seed in thy Field? From whence then hath it Tares?
He ſaid unto them, an Enemy hath done this. The Servants ſaid unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?
But he ſaid nay; leſt while ye gather up the Tares, ye root up alſo the Wheat with them.
Let both grow together until the Harveſt; and in the time of Harveſt I will ſay to the reapers, gather ye together firſt the Tares, and bind them in Bundles to burn them: But gather the Wheat into my Barn.

THE Interpretation of this Parable is thus ſet down, *Ver.* 37. of this Chapter, *He that ſoweth the good Seed is*

the Son of Man, the Field is the World, the good Seeds are the Children of the Kingdom, but the Tares are the Children of the wicked one; the Enemy that sowed them is the Devil, the Harvest is the End of the World, and the Reapers are the Angels. As therefore, the Tares are gather'd and burnt in the Fire, so shall it be in the End of the World. The Son of Man shall send forth his Angels, and they shall gather out of his Kingdom all things that offend, and them that do Iniquity, and shall cast them into a Furnace of Fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth. Then shall the Righteous shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

From this Interpretation of this Parable, it appears, that the Design of it is to shew, for the Encouragement of the *sincerely* good, and Terrour of the *Hypocritical*; that though there may be many *wicked* Professors of Christianity, that are Christians only in *Name* and *Out-side*, and who in this World may be confusedly intermix'd among the good, and go *undiscover'd* of *Men*, and *unpunish'd* of *God*; nay, *thrive* and *prosper* here more than the good, and to all outward Appearance be the *Favourites* of Heaven, whilst the sincerely good undergo many *Afflictions*, and appear to Men to be under God's *Displeasure*: Yet, in the great Harvest that shall be at the End of the World, there shall be a Distinction made between the one and the other, the hypocritical shall be separated from the sincere, and the

the former conſign'd to everlaſting Burnings, and the latter received into the Heavenly Regions, the Place prepared for them from the Beginning of the World.

This is the *Deſign* of the Parable. We ſhall now briefly conſider how *aptly* expreſſive it is of this Senſe, and then diſcourſe upon the ſeveral Parts of it.

The planting of the Goſpel in the World in order to the converting Men to Chriſtianity, is compared to the *ſowing of Seed*, becauſe (as was ſaid upon the former Parable) the Goſpel, like *Seed*, is that *Principle* of a future great *Increaſe* of Piety and Holineſs in this World, and of Glory and Happineſs in the next: 'Tis that, which if ſincerely embrac'd, and its Growth and Progreſs not hindred, will ſpring up to *Glory*, *Honour and Immortality*: And 'tis ſaid to be like Seed *ſown* or committed to the Furrows, and then left to its own *ſeminal Powers* and the favourable Influences of *Heaven*; becauſe the Goſpel, being *actually planted* in the World, is, as to *particular* Perſons, left to make its Way by its own *Power and Efficacy*, the *Excellency* of its *Precepts*, and its *tranſcendent Rewards and Puniſhments*; together with the conſtant Dews of the *Divine Grace* that attend it; without any more *extraordinary* Means, unleſs upon ſome *extraordinary Occaſion*, to make it take Root and fructifie. 'Tis *generally* propos'd to *all*, in its whole *Latitude*; which is

the *sowing* of it, and then Men are left to their own free Choice, whether they will *embrace* it with its *Promises*, or turn their *Backs* upon it, and run the Hazard of its *Threats*, without any *irresistible Force* to the one or the other; only the *small still Voice* of God's Spirit in Mens Hearts, and *Grace* descending like the *gentle Dew*, to soften and incline them to *cherish* this good Seed, which is the leaving the Gospel to its *own seminal Powers*, with only the benign Waterings of the Divine Grace and Blessing.

Our Lord is call'd the *Sower* of the good Seed, because he is the *Author* and first Teacher of this holy Religion; and its Validity to the great Purposes to which it is design'd, depends upon the Merit of his bitter Death and Passion, and the *invigorating* Vertue of his *precious Blood*. For, 'twas upon his satisfying the Divine Justice by his *Death*, that he receiv'd Authority to mark out to us *this* Way to Life and Reconciliation, as the only Principle and Seed of Immortality.

The *World* is call'd the Field where this Seed is sown, because this blessed Religion is *catholick* and *universal*, not confined to any *particular Place* or *People* as the Jewish Religion was, but *whosoever*, of what *Nation* or *People* soever, shall *believe* in Jesus, and *repent*, shall be saved. And agreeably in another Parable (which, for its great Analogy to this, I shall not particularly discourse of) the

Gospel,

Goſpel, or Kingdom of Chriſt is repreſented by a Net caſt into the *Sea*, *Matth.* 13. 47. not any particular *Lake* or *River* : And *this* World is ſtiled the Field, becauſe *this* is the only Place of receiving this Seed, and bringing forth the genuine and expected Fruits of it ; and he that ſhall refuſe to receive this Divine Seed *now* while he continues *here*, or not ſuffer it to grow, and increaſe, and bring forth *Fruit*, ſhall never have the like Opportunity *again*, but ſuffer for ever the Puniſhment threatned to *obſtinate Infidelity*, or *barren Unfruitfulneſs*. *This* World is the only *Field*, *this Life* the only *Seed-time*, and at the End of it comes that one great *Harveſt*, which ſhall conſign Men to an *eternal* Condition, either happy or miſerable, according to their Barrenneſs or Fruitfulneſs, during this Time, and in this Place of Growth and Increaſe.

The Children of the Kingdom, or thoſe that are *ſincere* Chriſtians, intirely devoted to the Service of their great Maſter, and have receiv'd the good Seed of the Goſpel into *honeſt* and *good Hearts*, as 'tis expreſſed in the preceeding Parable : Theſe are themſelves likewiſe compared to *good Seed*, becauſe they have a *ſubſtantial* Piety, the *Power* as well as the *Form* and Appearance of Godlineſs, and bring forth the genuine Fruits of their holy Religion. That Divine Seed that was ſown in their Hearts, has produced, not only the

Blade, but the *full Grain* in the Ear; the same Kind of Seed that was *sown*, appears in their Lives and Conversations; the Seed of the *Spirit* brings forth the *Fruits* of the *Spirit*, and the Seed of *Holiness* produces *real* and substantial *Holiness*; so that the *Gospel* is called *good Seed*, as 'tis the first *Principle* of Holiness; and truly *pious Men* are likewise call'd *good Seed*, as the genuine *Product* and *Increase* of that first Principle. The *Gospel* is the good Seed *sown*, and the sincerely *religious* are the good Seed as *springing* from it and being *produc'd* by it.

The Children of the wicked one, or the *hypocritical* Professors of Christianity, are compared to *Tares* or *Cockle*, because they have only a Shew and *Appearance* of Religion as Tares and Cockle have of Corn; but like them, no *Substance* of good Corn, none of the *real Excellencies* of Religion, nothing but *hurtful* and *vicious* Qualities as Tares are said to have; hurtful to *themselves* in the final Consequence, as bringing them to so miserable an End; and hurtful to *others* by their ill Neighbourhood and Converse, as Tares to Wheat; and likewise injurious to the *holy Religion* they profess, as reflecting Dishonour upon it by their scandalous Conversation. Upon all Accounts 'tis *infælix Lolium*, as the Poet calls it; *unhappy* Tares they are, that bring *Dishonour* upon *God*, and *Destruction* upon *themselves* and *others*.

The

The *Devil* is very fitly ſtiled the *Enemy* that *ſows* theſe Tares, becauſe he is the buſie Prompter to Vice and Hypocriſy, and the great Encourager of it, by his ſly and wheedling Inſinuations and Wicked Injections: He is that great Enemy of God and all things heavenly and good, and whoſe conſtant Endeavour it is to oppoſe and weaken the Kingdom of Righteouſneſs, and upon the Ruins of it to eſtabliſh his infernal Dominion.

The *End of the World* is compared to the *Harveſt*, becauſe then is the Time of God's gathering all Men from off the Face of the Earth, and diſpoſing them according to their Deſervings, into a new State of endleſs Happineſs or Miſery, as *good Corn* at Harveſt, is taken from off the Ground, and carried away, and laid up in Repoſitories of Safety; but the Tares and other noxious Weeds ſever'd from the reſt, and bound up in Bundles to be burnt. And the *Angels* are ſaid to be the *Reapers* at this great Harveſt; becauſe 'tis by their Miniſtry that God will execute his moſt equal Sentence, whether of Abſolution or Condemnation; the *Righteous* ſhall by them be caught up into the Clouds to meet their Lord in the Air, and like good Corn be laid up, and that for ever, in God's Heavenly Garner, *for they ſhall ever be with the Lord*: And the wicked and *hypocritical* ſhall by them be ſeparated from the good, and like vile Tares be thrown into a *Furnace of Fire unquenchable*. And thus much

much in short for the Aptness to express the Sense that our Lord conceal'd under it.

I shall now proceed to consider its several Parts; And it will inform us of six things.

First, it will inform us of the *State* of the Christian Church in *this* World; that there will be both good and bad under the general Name of *Christians* (as Tares and Wheat together, go under the Name of one Field of Corn) and that the Two first Planters of this Good and Evil respectively, are *Christ* and the *Devil*.

That there will be both good and bad in this World under the general Name of *Christians*, will be no wonder to any Man that considers how many there are that are Christians by *Custom* and *Education* only, because their Fathers were so before 'em, and in their tender years procur'd their Reception into that Communion; but, seldom look any further into the *Reasons* and *Inducements* to such Belief, and trouble themselves but very little to be *inform'd* in, much less to *practice* the Duties that are bound upon them by that holy Profession: And for the same Reason would have been Mahometans or Jews had their Parents been so, and Educated them in that Way, and therefore are *Christians* by *Chance*, not *Choice*.

And, this those would do well to consider who spend the whole Six Days of the Week in drudging for the World from Morning until

til Night; and then, like tir'd Beaſts, when they have fill'd their Bellies, without any further Thoughts, lay them down to reſt; and when the Lord's Day comes (which is deſign'd for the Nouriſhment and Improvement of their Souls in Piety and Goodneſs, and their *Inſtruction* in the Religion they profeſs to be of) make little better uſe of it than their Horſes do in the Stable, reſt from bodily Labour, and ſaunter and prate and drink away the Day; but ſeldom come at the Places of Divine Worſhip and Inſtruction; and if *they do*, are as little the better for it as if they were abſent. Let ſuch conſider, before it be too late, whether *this Sort* of Chriſtianity will bring 'em to Heaven or no? Whether their being *baptized* in their *Infancy* will ſave 'em without any *more to do?* Whether their telling our Lord at the Day of Judgment, that they happen'd to be born in a Country where his Holy Religion was profeſs'd, and of ſuch as call'd themſelves Chriſtians, and were by them preſented to a Miniſter of Chriſt who receiv'd them into the Pale of the Catholick Church, and that they continued to call themſelves Chriſtians all their Lives, and now and then came to Church as other Chriſtians did: Let them conſider, whether at that great Day ſuch an empty Plea will be accepted, when the Judge comes to enquire into what *Obedience* they have paid to his *Commandments*? If it *will* be accepted, why does our Lord ſay,

Not

Not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven? Mat. 7. 21. And why is the *Way* said to be *narrow*, and *the Gate strait that leads to Life, and that few there be that find it?* Mat. 7. 14. But, if it will not be accepted, as most certainly it will not; Doubtless, it highly concerns such Men to consider more seriously of Religion, than they have done hitherto; unless they think their Souls not worth taking care of, or that the everlasting Pains of Hell, are not so *great* as those of *Repentance*, and living a *new Life*. And tho' for the Reason assign'd above, it is no Wonder that many ill Men here, go under the common Name of Christians, and that *Title* be all the Christianity they can boast of; yet, 'twould be a very great Wonder indeed, if such *empty Tares* as these should be laid up with the *good Wheat*, and get to Heaven as much by *Chance* as they became Christians.

Further, 'tis no strange thing to find ill Men amongst a Society of *Christians*, because *Men* are *free Agents*; and *Religion* does not *force*, but only by proper Methods *incline* and *perswade*: And those, who in their *Infancy* were devoted to the Service of God, and Educated in his Discipline in their *tender* Years, may yet, through the Predominancy of their *Lusts* and *vile Affections*, and the *Temptations* of the *wicked* one, together with their own care-

careleſs *Inadvertency*, be, when grown up, inclined to live at quite another Rate than Chriſtianity allows: And though, for Faſhion's ſake, they may retain the *Name* of Chriſtians, yet chooſe to be indeed the Servants of their own *Paſſions*, and of the *Prince of Darkneſs*.

And therefore, 'tis very unreaſonable for the Enemies of Religion to conclude as they do, that becauſe many that *profeſs* Chriſtianity, live in direct *Contradiction* to it; therefore the whole is a *Cheat*: Since, did they believe what that Religion teaches, to be true, they would not dare to live in ſuch continual *Oppoſition* to it.

Indeed, this ſhould make all Chriſtians very careful and circumſpect in their Converſation, leſt they bring ſo great a Scandal as this upon their Holy Religion (remembring our Lord's Words, *Woe be to him, by whom the Offence or Scandal cometh*:) But it will not at all follow, that becauſe ſome of a Profeſſion live contrary to its Precepts and Doctrine, that therefore the whole is a *Forgery*.

For, *believing* and *doing* are Two very *different* things; and a Man may *habitually* aſſent to the Truth of a thing; and yet not *actually attend* to it: As a Man may be very well aſſured that there is a dangerous *Pit* in his Way, and yet be ſo taken up with minding other things, as not to *attend* to the Danger, and heedleſsly *fall into it*. And ſo a Man

Man may *habitually* believe that there is a Pit of Bottomless Destruction, which will at length swallow up the incorrigibly wicked; and yet, be so deeply engag'd in the Pleasures and Follies of the World, as not to *attend* to it till 'tis too late.

But, suppose *some* that *call* themselves *Christians*, do *not at all believe* any thing of the Christian Religion; there are innumerable more that *do* believe and live accordingly; and the Harmony of their Belief and Practice, methinks should be a better Argument in the *Affirmative*, than the Infidelity and Debauchery of a few *Titular* Christians should be in the *Negative*. And though to a Man that stiles himself a *Christian*, and yet believes not a Word of the Matter, to *him* the Whole of Religion is as nothing, yet certainly it cannot be from thence concluded, that therefore 'tis *really* and indeed a *Fiction*. For, that may be assuredly *true*, and that to their *Cost*, which some Men *don't care to believe*.

Thus we see 'tis no strange thing that there should be both good and bad that go under the general Name of *Christians* in *this* World; and that though some are much scandaliz'd at it, and raise an Objection from it against the Truth of the Religion, yet there is no Reason so to do; for 'tis not the *Name* that makes a *Christian*; he only is a Christian *indeed*, that to a *right Belief* adjoins *good Works*.

The

The firſt *Planters* of the good Seed or the Tares, the bad or good Profeſſors of Chriſtianity reſpectively, are *Chriſt* and the *Devil*. *Chriſt*, by teaching a Holy Religion to the World, ſuch as ſhall conduct Men to Glory and Immortality, and by the good Motions and Inſpirations of his Holy Spirit, inclining 'em to imbrace it, does endeavour to make all Men *happy*, to deliver 'em from the Miſeries of *this* World, (for if *Sin* were weeded out of it, there would be no *Miſery* in it) and to prepare 'em for the eternal and ineffable Felicities of the Kingdom of Glory; in which, after a perſevering Righteouſneſs here, they ſhall be actually inſtated. The Devil, on the contrary, that great Enemy both to God and Man, makes it *his* great Endeavour, by all Sorts of Wiles and Stratagems, to *obliterate* the Divine Impreſſions of this Holy Religion upon Mens Souls, to divert 'em from *attending* to its great Beauty and Excellency, and the Nature and Durarion of its Rewards and Puniſhments; to perſwade 'em that *here* lies the only Scene of Happineſs, and that a *future* Felicity or Miſery is only fit to amuſe and frighten Children withal; that the Deſires of the Body are given us that we might gratify them to the *full*, and that to *deny* and *mortify our ſelves*, is the moſt unnatural Cruelty in the World; that we muſt make our ſelves happy, while we have *Opportunity*, and not to truſt too much to uncertain Reverſions.

And,

And, when he can't *wholly blot out* the Belief of another World, then he endeavours to *corrupt* it, by perswading us that a very little Religion will serve turn, seeing we have to do with so *merciful* a God.

And, if by these Means or the like, of which he has great Variety, he can incline Men, if not intirely to *Apostatize* from Christianity, yet, like *Tares*, to rest satisfied with the Name and *Appearance* of Christians, and live at loose and random, and follow the Stream of their own Passions and Desires, and his sly Insinuations and tempting Delusions; then he has his End, and will at length cheat 'em of the Happiness that Christ design'd 'em, and decoy 'em into his own Possession, and so bring them to the Portion of Tares and noxious Weeds, that *Furnace of Fire prepar'd for himself and his Angels.*

And therefore, as we tender our Eternal Welfare, we must be very watchful and observant, that we may discover the sly Insinuations of this our great Enemy. Whatever would disparage Religion, or lessen the Obligation to a good Life, comes certainly from that infernal Tempter. The Temptations to an excessive Gratification of our bodily Appetites, assuredly come from *him*; the *Opportunities* of *Vice* are of his disposing, and 'tis he that ingages us in so great a Love and earnest Pursuit of the *World*. And therefore every thing of this Nature must be rejected with the

the greateſt Abomination, as the Endeavours of our great Enemy, to deprive us of our Happineſs, and involve us in his own Ruine.

And, on the contrary, thoſe bleſſed Motions that we all of us often feel to a more pious and holy Converſation, muſt be thankfully embrac'd, and chearfully follow'd, as the Directions and Excitations of our dear Saviour, to what is conducive to our Eternal Happineſs. They are thoſe heavenly Dews which will refreſh our Souls, and improve their Growth and Increaſe in Holineſs; and if ſincerely co-operated with, will at length bring the Fruits of our holy Religion to Perfection.

And thus much for the firſt thing this Parable informs us of, namely, That the ſtate of the Goſpel in *this* World is ſuch, that there will be both bad and good under the general Name of Chriſtians (as good Corn and Weeds together go under the Name of one Field of Corn) and that the firſt Planters of this Good and Evil reſpectively, are Chriſt and the Devil; together with the Improvement of each Conſideration to the Intereſt of Religion.

But, before I quite leave this Particular, I ſhall, from what has been ſaid of the promiſcuous Mixture of bad and good Men in the Chriſtian Church, and God's ſuffering it to be ſo without any extraordinary Diſcrimination: From this I ſhall obſerve how un-

reasonable 'tis for some to object, as too many do, against the Reception of the Lord's Supper in our Church, because, as they say, we admit any that will come, even those that have been scandalous Livers, and by that Means the Solemnity is prophan'd, and made less beneficial to the *good*.

But now, *supposing*, though not *granting*, that we admit any that will come, though Men of ill Lives, (I say, not *granting* this, for the thing is evidently false, as appears from the *Exhortations* to the Communicants before, and at the Solemnity, and from the *Rubric* of that Office: And from the 26, 27, and 28th *Cannons* of our Church, in which Ministers are expresly forbidden to admit *notorious Offenders*, *Schismaticks* and *Strangers* to the Communion.) But supposing this, which is so evidently *false* as to the *Church*, to be *true* as to some *particular Ministers*; why must communicating with such Ministers, and, as we think, in such prophane Company, be unchristianly abstain'd from, and the Ministers declaim'd against with so much Bitterness? At this rate they may as well desert the Communion of the *whole* Church of Christ, and refuse to join in *any* part of Divine Worship; for no Doubt but ill Men are intermix'd in *all*, though they may not be *discover'd*; and if their Company will unhallow and make ineffectual *one* Duty of Christianity, I can't see why it should

ſhould not do the like to all the reſt. And, if a Separation were admitted upon ſuch Accounts as theſe, there would be no ſuch thing as an *external Communion of Saints*, becauſe ſuch is the ſtate of the Goſpel in this World, that the bad will be intermix'd with the good, as Tares are in a Field of Wheat.

And as to the Practice of particular Miniſters, I charitably hope none do admit of *notorious* Offenders to the Communion, without receiving ſatisfactory Marks of their *Repentance*, or at leaſt by previous Diſcourſe or Writing: When they know of their Intention to communicate, let 'em know the great Danger of receiving unworthily, and urge them to an immediate ſincere Repentance, or elſe forbid 'em at their Peril to approach the Holy Table. And if after all this they will come, we are to ſuppoſe in Charity that they have *repented*, except we are ſure to the contrary.

And, if a Miniſter ſees one at the Table, whoſe Life has, in many Inſtances, to his Knowledge, been very faulty, unleſs the Crimes have been very *great* and very *notorious*; to reject ſuch an one, I think, (with Submiſſion) would be arrogant and uncharitable, and might exaſperate the Man to ſo high a Degree, as to make him throw off *all* Regard to Religion for the future; and in ſuch a Caſe the Exhortation appointed to be read at the Time of celebrating thoſe

Holy Mysteries, should, one would think, be Warning sufficient for such an one, if *unrepentant*, to *withdraw*; and if he *stays*, Charity would incline one to believe that he was *penitent*. And, if a Person kneeling by, who perhaps knows much more of the Man's Course of Life than the Minister, shall be offended at his communicating, one that receives so *unworthily*, and speak hard things of him, and abstain from that blessed Ordinance upon this Account for the future, as prophan'd by such mix'd Company at it; this is highly unreasonable, uncharitable and unnatural. 'Tis *unreasonable* with Relation to their hard Thoughts and Censures of the Minister, because *Charity* obliges *him* to think *well* of such as present themselves at the *holy Table*, unless there be great and undeniable *Evidence* of their *obstinate* and *continued* Wickedness; and in such a Case I dare say no pious Minister would prostitute those holy Symbols to such Swine: And, where there is not such Evidence, Ministers can search Mens *Hearts* no more than other Men, and therefore must hope the *best*, and judge according to the *outward Appearance*; and should they communicate, some that receive *unworthily*, by this Means (as 'tis to be fear'd they too often do) why should they be blam'd for that which 'tis impossible for 'em to help; and *aspers'd*, and all further Communion with them deserted, for suffering that *ignorantly*,

which

which *God*, though the *Searcher of all Hearts*, permits in his Church without any open Diſcrimination; namely, the bad to join in all holy Offices with the good. ?. And this Practice is as *uncharitable* as 'tis unreaſonable, becauſe 'tis judging and condemning thoſe as Reprobates, obſtinate, unrepenting Sinners, whoſe *Hearts* we cannot ſee; and who, tho' formerly egregiouſly wicked, yet now, through the mighty Efficacy of God's converting Grace, may, for ought we know, to the contrary, be better than our ſelves. And, 'tis an *unnatural* Practice too, becauſe 'tis the depriving our ſelves of the *Comforts* that attend the Reception of that holy Sacrament, and thoſe of *Union* and *brotherly Love*, meerly upon a *groundleſs Nicety*.

Let us all rather learn not to judge others before the Time, but leave every Man to ſtand or fall by the unerring Judgment of our great Maſter at the laſt Day; leſt by judging others we condemn our ſelves who do the ſame things, and it may be worſe. And, inſtead of abſtaining from the Sacrament, becauſe ſome come and are admitted to it, whom we think, and it may be not without Reaſon, are not ſo well prepar'd as they ſhould be; endeavour to make our *ſelves* ſtill more and more fit for ſo holy an Ordinance by a dayly Amendment of Life; and then *our Fleece*, like that of *Gideon*, ſhall be *moiſtned*, though *other* Mens be *dry*. The

Apostles were never the *less* dear to our Saviour for *Judas* his being amongst 'em, but the *more* so rather; and though, through the Wickedness that was in his Heart, Satan enter'd into him after he had receiv'd the Sop our Lord gave him at the Celebration of the Passover, and in all Probability did partake of what he consecrated in Memory of his succeeding Death and Sufferings; yet the rest receiv'd miraculous Assistances of the Holy Ghost, and were faithful to the Death, and for certain have receiv'd the Crown of Life. And I hope this will satisfie for the future, such as upon this Account have abstain'd from the Blessed Sacrament, and censur'd the *Ministers* of our Church, and (tho' without all Reason) our *Church it self*: And as what has been said upon this Matter, has been no *impertinent* Digression, so I hope it may be a *beneficial* one.

Let us now proceed to the *second* Thing this Parable informs us of, namely, The *Time when* God's and our great Enemy the Devil sowes his Tares among the Wheat, and that is while Men *sleep*. For so the Parable, *while Men slept the Enemy came and sow'd Tares among the Wheat and went his Way*. *Then* is the Time of his injecting his wicked Insinuations into Mens Hearts, whereby to make 'em become like *empty Tares*, Christians in Name and *Appearance* only, but devoid of the *substantial Graces* and Vertues of that holy Profession.

By

By Mens *ſleeping* is here meant a careleſs *Inadvertency* and Neglect of the Things of *Religion*; a ſtupid Security in a *thoughtleſs* Way of Life. And this is a Metaphor which the ſacred Writers have often made uſe of to this Purpoſe; and 'tis ſo expreſſive of what they would repreſent by it, that 'twill be worth our while briefly to conſider, wherein the Likeneſs of ſuch thoughtleſs Inadvertency in Religious Matters to *ſleep*, does conſiſt.

It is like it, in the firſt Place in its *Cauſe*: For, as Toil and *Labour*, and any thing that brings *Wearineſs* and conſumes the Spirits, diſpoſes the *Body* to *Sleep*, and makes it deſire Reſt and Eaſe that it may have a *Recruit*; ſo this *moral* Drowſineſs or Hebetude of the *Soul*, generally begins to creep upon Men, when they find *difficulty* in Religion; a little ſtriving ſoon puts 'em out of Heart, their Hands fall, their Knees grow feeble, their Soul *faints* within 'em, all Hope of Victory is then laid aſide, and they ſit them down as Men quite ſpent, and *then* ſteals that *deep Sleep* upon them, which too often ends in *Death*.

Thus we often ſee Men ſet very briskly upon the Practice of Religion at *Firſt*, and ſeem wondrouſly pleas'd with their new Choice, and admire at their Stupidity that they did not *ſooner* diſcover the tranſcendent Beauties of Holineſs, and are reſolv'd to *re-*

deem their mis-spent Time, and talk of nothing but Raptures, and of reaching great *Hights* and *Eminencies* of Piety; when all on the suddain they are at a *Stand*, there's a *Lyon* in the Way, a *right Hand* must be *cut off*, or a *right Eye* put out, *i. e.* some *Favourite* Vice must be cashier'd if they move any *further*, and that's a *hard* Saying, and the Men begin to *cool*, a *Stifness* seizes their overheated Limbs, and a senseless Torpor invades every Part of 'em; and like the young Man in the Gospel, *Mark* 10. 21. whom our Lord began to love for his discreet Answers and towardly Disposition, when they must part with their *Riches* to the *Poor*, and *deny* themselves, their corrupt Desires and Inclinations, and take up their *Cross* and follow their Saviour: Then they become *sad*, and with Grief and *Dissatisfaction leave* him, and fold their Hands, and return again to their *Dream of Vanity*. Just like those in the former Parable, compar'd to *stony Ground*, who receiv'd the Word at first with *Joy*, but having not sufficient Deepness of Earth, *i. e.* for want of through Consideration, and beholding the *smooth* Side of Religion only, endure but for a *while*, and in Time of Temptation and Difficulty fall away, and their former Piety becomes dry and wither'd. Or like those mention'd in another Parable, *Luke* 14. 28. (which was spoken upon this very Account, and which, for its great Affinity with this Part

of

of the Parable we are now upon, I ſhall not particularly diſcourſe of) who *begin to build, and ſit not down firſt and count the Coſt whether they be able to finiſh*, and ſo proceeding no further than *Foundation* become the Scorn of all Men. But,

Secondly, as a State of careleſs Inadvertency to the things of Religion, is like *Sleep* in its *Cauſe* aud *Beginning*; ſo likewiſe is it, in its Progreſs and Effects. For, like *Sleep*, it *locks* up all the Powers and Faculties of the Soul, and *ſuſpends* their *Action*; it *dulls* its *Apprehenſion*, and makes it take Evil for Good, and Good for Evil; it *vitiates* its *Reaſoning*, and makes it draw falſe and fantaſtick Conſequences and Concluſions; and therefore *corrupts* its *Will* and *Affections*; and makes its *Choices* ſtrangely *fooliſh* and *ridiculous*, ſuch as preferring *Earth* before *Heaven*, a *little Eaſe* and *imperfect Pleaſure* here, before *Rivers* of *ineffable Pleaſures* that are at *God's right hand for evermore*; and the like. The *lower* Life is in this Caſe *predominant*, and wild *Dreams* and incoherent Fancies, make up ſuch Men's Divinity, and their Rule of Life and Manners. In ſhort, the Life of ſuch Men is but a *Dream*; their *Notions*, like thoſe of Men in a Slumber, dark, hovering and uncertain; their *Diſcourſe* about *Religious* Matters, broken, disjointed, unconcluding, full of Fallacies and dangerous Sophiſtry, to cheat themſelves of all *Expectation* here and *Enjoyment* hereafter

after of what is their greatest, nay, their *only Happiness*. Their Actions are like those done in a *Dream* too, extravagant, brutish, and unaccountable; startled at *Chimæra's* and the *Shadows* of Danger, and *insensible* of the Approaches of *real* and *substantial* Misery, tho' just ready to overtake them; *fond* of a Bundle of *Feathers*, in *Love* with an *Airy Nothing*, whilst their *true* Interest is not in all their Thoughts. And, to *compleat* the Parallel, they are as Deaf to all *Reproofs* as Men asleep; as little affected with good Instruction and Advice, and so bewitch'd with the Fancy'd *Sweetness* of their Slumber, that they are as *Loath* to be *awaken'd*: And when by *Ruder* Applications they *are*, like Men that have taken too large a Dose of Opium, they are presently overcome with Heaviness, and shut their Eyes against all Conviction ond fall asleep again. And the final Event is this; that as *Natural* Drowsiness Cloaths a Man with *Rags*, so the *Moral* will Cloath him with *Shame and utter Confusion*.

And now, from this short Parallel which I have drawn between the Sleep of the Soul and the Body; as we may see the Fitness of the Expression in the Parable, so we may learn what Guard to keep upon our selves to prevent our infernal Enemies sowing his *Tares*, or making *us* become as such, by his Wicked Insinuations and Suggestions. 'Tis while Men thus *Sleep*, are thus

thus Thoughtleſs and Inadvertent to Religion, and taken up with the Gaieties and Pleaſures of the World, which, like pleaſant Dreams, entertain the *Fancy* and *Imagination* with much Delight, but ſoon vaniſh and become utterly unprofitable; *then* it is that this ſubtle Enemy makes uſe of his Opportunity, and unobſerv'd, *Steals* in his wicked Injections, which divert the Soul ſtill *more* and *more* from attending to her main Intereſt, and promote this Spiritual Slumber ſo long, till too often it becomes Chronical and Habitual, and an utter Oblivion of all Religious Obligations, an incurable Numneſs and Stupidity of Soul, God knows, too often follows; and Men become like *Tares*, empty of all ſubſtantial Goodneſs, and at beſt but Chriſtians in Name and Shew, and fit for nothing, but when God ſhall ſee fit, to be gathered up from among the Wheat and burnt.

Wherefore it highly concerns all thoſe that hope to be *ſav'd*, *not to ſleep as do others, but to watch and be ſober*; *to awake to Righteouſneſs, and walk circumſpectly*, *not as Fools* diverted by every Feather and gay Appearance, but, as Men that are wiſe to Salvation, always in a Poſture of Watchfulneſs and Defence. Fixing our Attention upon our Duty and the exceeding great Reward of it, and often reflecting upon that intolerable Miſery, which will certainly be the

the Consequence of such fatal Slumberings, and still pressing *on* with greater Courage as the Difficulties of Religion increase upon us; and daily endeavouring still more and more to shake off Dead Stupidity to Religion which so easily besets us, and to rouze up our Faculties and employ 'em upon those noblest of Objects, patiently receiving Instruction and Reproof; rejecting every Notion and Opinion that would destroy the Necessity of a good Life, and studiously avoiding *Idleness* and *Sloth*, and, according to our Lord's most excellent Advice, adding *Prayer* to *Watchfulness*, that *we enter not into Temptation.*

This Course if we take, we shall defeat this generally prevailing Stratagem of the subtle Tempter; and being always in a Readiness to resist him, make him fly from us with Shame and Disappointment. And our Souls will then grow more and more *Substantial* in Piety, and abound in it as the good Corn; and at length, being grown ripe for the Glories and Felicities of Heaven, be gather'd in Peace, and laid up in Repositories of Eternal Rest and Safety, as in the blessed *Garner of our Lord.*

Thirdly, this Parable informs us of the Time of *Discovery* of the Tares, the *Hypocritical* Religionists; namely, the Time of *bringing forth Fruit*: When the Blade was *sprung* up and brought forth *Fruit*, or when the

the *Grain* appear'd in the Ear, *then* appear'd the Tares alſo. *Then* appear'd the Difference between the *good Corn* and the *Cockle*, which at firſt coming up look'd as flouriſhing and promis'd as fair as the good Corn; but when the Time drew nigh that the *Corn* ſhould appear and come to Ripeneſs and Perfection, then there was a manifeſt Diſparity, and what appear'd ſo well at firſt was then found to be an *empty noxious Weed.* And thus it is too often in Religion.

Many Men make a fair Shew and *Semblance* of Piety; attend the Place of Divine Worſhip, with much ſeeming Seriouſneſs and Devotion; and to all outward Appearance, liſten to the Sermons of the Goſpel, and Beg the Divine Aid (as that Dew of Heaven, which alone can make 'em fruitful) as earneſtly as others do; And this *looks* very well, and is (as far as Men or Angels can diſcern for the preſent) as hopeful a Beginning as need be deſir'd. The *really* good Seed can ſend forth nothing more promiſing at firſt; and hitherto the Tares grow *undiſcover'd* among the Wheat, by any Eye but that of God.

But after this firſt *Blade* has appear'd, and that for ſome conſiderable Time; after they have begun to make this *Shew* of Religion; inſtead of advancing further and further to *Perfection*, as the good Seed does,

and

and abounding in every good Work like the full Grain in the Ear; these have nothing but a *Blade* and *Stalk* of Religion, no *Fruit* appears, there is no *Real Substantial Vertue* attends this *Shew* of Piety, but rather the Works of the Flesh are discernable in their Lives and Conversations. And this is a plain Discovery to themselves and others, that they are but *formal*, not *sincere* Christians; vile Unhappy *Tares*, but not *good Seed*; *for every Tree is known by its Fruits.*

Wherefore, let no Man flatter himself with vain Hopes from a formal *Customary* Religion, when there are no real *Fruits* of *Righteousness*, but on the contrary, much Wickedness and Folly and Vanity; for, unless his Religion makes him *grow* in *Grace* and Vertue, and is seen in all his Conversation, 'twill be to no purpose to make an Hypocritical Shew of it at Church; and is no better than the most provoking *Mockery* of God, and an unnatural *Starving* of the Soul with such *Fantastick* Food, and will consign to the lowest Hell, which is the Portion of Hypocrites.

And as a Hypocritical Religion will have a very sad Consequence in the *other* World, so it exposes Men to much *Shame* and *Contempt* in *this*. For every Man that sees such great Shews of Religion, such Pretences to Christian Vertue, will Naturally

expect

expect to find the Man *all of a Piece*, and that to his *Devotion* and Shew of *Godlineſs* at Church, be added *Sobriety* and *Righteouſneſs* in his Converſation and Intercourſe with Men. As when Men ſee the firſt Sproutings and Flouriſhing of a Field that was ſown with good Grain, they expect to find Increaſe of the ſame good Fruits. But, when after all this fair and florid Shew of Piety and Goodneſs, there appears nothing but *Tares*, and the Man that is over-run with Wicked Habits and Vile Affections, little or no Sign of a real *Senſe* of Religion upon his Mind, but rather the hidden Works of *Diſhoneſty* in his Dealings; *Lying and Colluſion* inſtead of *Sincerity and Truth*; Lewdneſs and Intemperance, Pride and Malice, inſtead of Purity both of Fleſh and Spirit: When ſuch *Vileneſs* as this treads upon the Heels of a Mans Shew of Religion, any Man may diſcern that he is a *Chriſtian Phariſee*, like a whited Sepulchre, beautiful *without*, but *within* full of Rottenneſs and all Uncleanneſs; that his Religion is *confined* to the *Church*, whither he goes ſometimes for Faſhion's Sake to *viſit* it, but always leaves it there *behind* him, and will not be troubled with its Company *abroad*.

Now, ſuch Hypocriſy as this, is certainly one of the moſt *hateful* things in the World, and inſtead of gaining *Reputation* to a Man; is the ready Way to make him a

common

common Scorn : Men can't but *discover* the abominable Cheat, and they can't but *hate* and *detest* it. Tares *will* at length appear to be Tares, and the sooner for being among the good Corn. 'Tis therefore certainly the greatest Folly in the World, to pretend to conceal under a fair Appearance, what will in a very short Time discover it self, and will bring a Man to nothing but Shame and Hatred in this World, and the Flames of Hell in the next. And it concerns every Man that desires to be happy here or hereafter, to lay aside all *Guile* and *Hypocrisy* in Religion, and sincerely endeavour after the *Power* of Godliness as well as put on the *Form* and Appearance of it. And thus much for the third Part of this Parable, *viz. when the Blade was sprung up and brought forth Fruit, then appear'd the Tares also.*

The next thing it informs us of, is the Holy *Angels* Observation of the Actions of Men, especially of *Christians*, and their Diligence and Watchfulness in doing God Service, and Zeal for his Glory : For thus 'tis said, *the Servants of the Houſholder*, that is, the *Angels*, as 'tis in the Interpretation, *came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good Seed in thy Field ? From whence then hath it Tares ? He said an Enemy hath done this.* They answered, *wilt thou then that we go and gather them up* ? They observ'd by the loose Lives of some Professors that there were very

ry ill Men that went under the Notion of Chriſtians; which they knew would reflect *Diſhonour* upon *Chriſt* the great Planter of that holy Religion, and would be injurious to the *Progreſs* of the Goſpel; and therefore they haſte to tell him that they may have his further Commands, and with *Zeal* for his *Glory*, and Intentions of great *Charity* to us poor *Mortals*, they offer their beſt Endeavours to rid the Church of thoſe ſcandalous hypocritical Members.

That the bleſſed *Angels*, are, by God's Appointment, Obſervers, and that for excellent Purpoſes, of the Lives and Actions of Mankind, eſpecially of *Chriſtians*; is evident not only from this Part of this Parable, but from many other Places of Scripture, as an attentive Reader of the holy Writings muſt often have obſerv'd: Of which, ſome few of the New Teſtament only that give moſt Light to this Matter, I ſhall at preſent mention. St. *Paul*, in 1 *Cor.* 11. 10. giving Directions for the more decent Service of God in the Church; for this Reaſon ſays he, according to the Cuſtom of that Time, ought Women to be *veil'd* or *cover'd* (as the true Senſe of the Place is) in their publick religious Aſſemblies, becauſe of *the Angels*: That is, leſt any thing indecent ſhould be obſerv'd by thoſe pure Spirits, who are preſent as God's *Spies* upon the Actions of Men. The laſt Verſe of the Firſt Chapter to the *Hebrews* is

likewise very plain to this Purpose, where the Apostle, speaking of the *Angels*, *Are they not all* says he, (as assur'd of the Truth of what he said) *Are they not all ministring Spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of Salvation?* That is, to take notice of their Behaviour in the World, in order to prevent their running into Courses ruinous, and to shield 'em from the mischievous Assaults of wicked Spirits. And, to mention but one Place more, St. *Paul* charges *Timothy*, 1 Tim. 5. 21. *Before, or as in the Presence of God and of Jesus Christ, and of the elect Angels*, that he would observe those things he had taught him without Prejudice or Partiality: Which plainly supposes that there were *Angels* then present, as Observers and Witnesses of what they were doing and discoursing.

It being then thus plain from Scripture, that the *blessed Angels* are Observers of Mens Lives and Actions, especially of those of *Christians*, as by God's Appointment, and as Ministers of his divine Government; I shall not trouble my self to make curious Enquiries into the Reasons *why* God appoints *Angels* to observe and minister to us, since nothing escapes his *own all-seeing Eye*, and his *own almighty Arm* can do whatsoever he pleases in Heaven and in Earth, in the Sea, and in all deep Places? Nor of what Rank and *Order* those Angels are, and how *many*, that are thus employ'd? And whether every Man has

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a *particular* Angel aſſign'd him as his Guardian and the Inſpector of his Actions? Which things are too *high* for us *Mortals*, we cannot attain unto them: But ſhall make this good Uſe of this particular relating to our Practice, That ſince we are under the Inſpection of ſuch *pure* and *holy* Spirits, and whoſe Concern for our Happineſs is very great; ſince they are Witneſſes of our moſt ſecret Actions, and tho' *inviſible* and unobſerv'd *themſelves*, are *our curious* Obſervers: Methinks, we that are our ſelves but in *one Rank* of Being *below* 'em *here*, and ſhall hereafter be *equal* to them, ſhould not endure to be found by 'em wallowing like *Swine* in the *Filth* of *Sin*, *degrading* our ſelves to a Level with the *Beaſts* that periſh, and in baſe Hypocriſie *pretending* to be *Chriſtians*, when indeed we act like *Infidels*: Nay, too often, like *Devils incarnate*. How do thoſe good Spirits, tho' they may *pity* our *deplorable* Condition, yet withal, *deſpiſe* and *abominate* the ſervile *Baſeneſs* of ſuch *excellent* Natures! Who, notwithſtanding they have ſuch glorious *Hopes*, yet quit their *heavenly Reverſion*, for the low Enjoyments of this *contemptible Earth*! Methinks *Shame* ſhould deter us from vile and impious Actions, if nothing elſe; and the Thoughts of the Dignity of our Nature, not ſuffer us to act ſo much *beneath* our ſelves; and a Man not *brutiſhly impudent*, ſhould not endure to expoſe himſelf to the Obſervation of an *Angel*

in such *vile* Circumstances, as he would be loath to be found in by any *Man* he reverences and respects, nay, by a Servant or a Child.

And as the Angels are *Observers* of Human Actions, so are they God's Intelligencers to give him account of them; not that God *needs* such Information, for every thing lies naked and open to his own *all-seeing Eye*, but for the greater Order and *Decorum* of his Government. And this their Office, they perform with great *Diligence* and *Watchfulness*, and ardent *Zeal* for his *Glory*; for no sooner were the *Tares* discerned by 'em to be among the good Corn, the formal empty Christians to be intermix'd with the sincerely good, but they hasten to give Account of it to their great Master, and as not being able to indure the great Dishonour reflected upon God and the purest of Religions, by their base Hypocrisie and impious Conversation, they offer, with his Permission, to remove those evil Doers, those not only *unprofitable*, but *wicked* Servants, as unworthy to continue any longer in so *sacred* a Society as that of *Christians*. *Wilt thou that we gather them up*? say they; wilt thou permit us to *weed* this thy great Field of those noxious Tares, to cull out the *empty nominal* Christians, and exert that Power thou hast given us, to their deserved Ruin; that the Residue of thy Servants may see it and fear, and keep from their Abominations? And that those blessed Spirits, that angelick Host,

Hoſt, is able to *perform* this Service, no Man can doubt that remembers how *one* Angel in *one* Night deſtroy'd all the Firſt born in *Ægypt*.

Now this *their* Diligence and Watchfulneſs in the Service of God, and Zeal for his Glory, ſhould put *us* upon a holy *Emulation* of doing *God's Will on Earth, as it is done in Heaven* : That is, that we, who here on Earth, are but a *little lower* than the Angels, *Luke* 20. 36. and ſhall in Heaven be *equal* to them ; ſhould now endeavour to be as like them as we *can*, and with the utmoſt Chearfulneſs, Alacrity and Diligence, perform the Duty our great Governour has ſet us ; and with a prudent Zeal endeavour in our ſeveral Stations, by *diſcountenancing* Vice, and *encouraging* and promoting *Vertue* to the utmoſt of our Power, to advance the Glory of God, and the Intereſt and Reputation of our holy Religion. If *Magiſtrates* would take due Notice of thoſe that live ſcandalouſly and wickedly, and not bear the Sword in *vain*, but be, as they ought to be, a *Terrour* to *Evil-Doers*, and *praiſe* and *encourage* thoſe that do *well* ; if the Governours of the *Church*, who are ſtil'd *Angels* in Scripture, would act like the Angels in this Parable, and curiouſly inſpect the Religion of their Charge, and by ſuch Methods as the Laws allow, either turn the Tares into good Seed (which, though impoſſible in *Nature*, yet *may be*, and I hope,

often *is* done in *Religion*) or pluck 'em up, if stubborn and irreclaimable; if Governours of *private Families*, warm'd with the like holy Zeal, would take the like Measures, and either *reform* their irreligious Servants and Dependents, or else rid themselves of 'em, and bring 'em to due legal Punishment: If this wholesome Course were taken with due *Diligence*, *Watchfulness and Prudence*, *Vice* would soon be *disheartened*, and *Vertue* more and more thrive and *Increase*; God's *Honour* would be vindicated, the *Credit* of Religion *redeemed*, our own *temporal* Happiness *advanced*, and innumerable Souls sav'd, that otherwise would for ever have *perish'd*.

And *this* would be a Work truly *worthy* of *Christians*; 'tis an *angelick* Undertaking; and every Man that prays, *Hallow'd be thy Name*, *thy Kingdom come*, *thy Will be done in Earth as 'tis in Heaven*, is bound in his own *Sphere*, and according to his best *Ability*, to *promote* what is contain'd in those Petitions, to the Glory of God and the Interest of Religion; as he expects and hopes to have an Answer of the *following* Petitions, and *receive his daily Bread*, *and have his Trespasses forgiven him*, and *to be preserved or supported in Temptation*, and *delivered from Evil*.

The *fifth* thing this Parable informs us of, is the Reason why God will not *suffer* the Angels as *yet* to *gather out* the Tares from among the good Seed, to discriminate Hypocritical

critical from ſincere Chriſtians, and give 'em their due Puniſhment; namely, *leſt while they gather up the Tares, they root up alſo the Wheat with them*; and therefore he ſuffers *both to grow together until the Harveſt.* That is, in other Words, the Reaſon of God's *Forbearance* of the *Wicked*, and not ſuffering the Angels, thoſe Miniſters of his Juſtice, to puniſh them in *this* World according to what they *deſerve*; is his great Care and Tenderneſs, even of the *temporal* Quiet and Safety of the *Righteous*: Which, by Reaſon of their *Intermixture* with the *wicked* here, would at *leaſt* be very much *diſturb'd* through the rooting up a wicked Generation; and without the Help of a Miracle, many a *good* Man might periſh in ſo great a Ruin. But Miracles we find God has never thought fit to work, but upon urgent *Neceſſity*, when his own *Glory*, and the Intereſt of *Religion* and the *Church* cannot *otherwiſe* be ſecur'd; now there being *no* ſuch *Neceſſity* of puniſhing the wicked by deſtroying 'em in *this* World, nor conſequently of *miraculouſly preſerving* thoſe that are truly good from a general Ruin; for the End of the World, that great Day of Recompence, is not far off, and both may live together until then; God, for the Sake of the ſincerely good, leſt *the Rod of the wicked ſhould come into the Lot of the Righteous*, does *generally* reſtrain the Zeal of thoſe bleſſed Spirits the Angels, and forbears the Tares till

that universal Harvest, when the Earth shall be eas'd of its Burthen, and then the *good Seed* shall be gather'd together in *Safety*, and the *Tares* left to be *consum'd* in that great Conflagration, when the World and all that remains in it shall be burnt up with Fire unquenchable. And when, in Case of almost a *total* Corruption of a City or Nation, and to strike a Terror into others, and convince the obdurate World that God *sees* and is able to *punish* obstinate and irreclaimable Sinners, God thinks fit to suffer his bright Host of Angels, utterly to *destroy* such wicked Places as sometimes we know he hath done; we have several Instances in Scripture, and other Histories of the *miraculous* Preservation of the *good*; and that, as the Psalmist expresses it, *though Thousands have fallen by their Side*, the Destruction *has not come nigh them*; *for he gives his Angels Charge over them, to keep 'em in all their Ways*, Psalm 91.

Of this great Care of Providence over the good, either in preserving for their Sakes, *Communities* destin'd to Ruin, or else covering *them* under the Wings of *Providence*, and shielding them from Danger till the Storm was over; there is an Instance in the 18th of *Genesis* so very remarkable that I can't pass it by. In the 23. Verse of that Chapter, we find *Abraham* interceeding with God for *Sodom* and *Gomorrha* (which he had resolv'd to destroy for the abominable and in-

incurable Wickedneſs that was in them) and he begins with what he thought would moſt prevail with God to ſpare the Place, and tells him the *Safety* of the *Righteous* would be hazarded, and that they would ſhare in the common Deſtruction; and therefore leſt he ſhould ſlay the Righteous with the Wicked, which he knew the Judge of all the Earth would be far from doing, he pleads with him for the Sake of *Fifty Righteous* that ſhould be found there (a ſmall Number one would think, and eaſie to be found in ſuch *populous*, tho' *wicked Places*) and at length (being encouraged by God's wondrous Goodneſs, who comply'd with him in every Requeſt, and as he *ſunk* the Number promis'd him he would not deſtroy) he, by degrees, deſcends to Ten; which was as far as ever his Modeſty would reach, and one would think far enough to ſecure the moſt wicked City upon Earth. Peradventure *Ten* be found there: *And God ſaid unto him, I will not deſtroy it for Ten's Sake.* Rather than thoſe *Ten* ſhould be in danger of periſhing in the general Ruin, he will *recall* the deſtroying Angel, and at leaſt *reſpite* the Execution of his Vengeance; and for *their* Sakes *reprieve* the condemn'd Place of their Abode. And when, through the *extream* Wickedneſs of thoſe Cities that *ſmall* Number of good Men was not found in them, and God therefore proceeded to ſhower down his fiery Indignation upon 'em, yet, he remembers *Righteous Lot* and his

his small Family, and sends two Angels to conduct 'em safely out of that accursed Place, who *hasten'd Lot*, lest he should be consum'd in the Iniquity of the Cities, and upon his Request spared *Zoar*, which he fled to, and bid him make haste thither, for that they could not do any thing till *he* was escap'd out of Danger; as you may read *Gen.* 19. 22.

And what a boundless Ocean is the goodness of God! That he should, not only so graciously accept the *imperfect* Services of his own People, as to take *them* into his peculiar Care and Protection; but for their *Sakes* likewise (that Destruction might not so much as come *nigh* their Dwellings) to spare *those* that have justly *merited* the severest Expresses of his *Displeasure*! This does indeed verify the words of the Psalmist, that his *Mercy is over all his Works.*

And this, as it should be a new Motive and Encouragement to *true* Holiness, which will be so great a Security in perilous Times both to our selves and others; and demonstrates the great *Ingratitude* and *Baseness* of the *World*, in hating and despising and afflicting the good, who yet are as so many *guardian Angels* to it, and shield it from the Expresses of God's just *Vengeance*: So it will silence that *Objection* against *Providence*, drawn from the continued Safety and Prosperity of the wicked, notwithstanding their living in open *Defiance* of God and his Commands. For we see, they are but *repriev'd* for the Sake of the Righteous,

lest

leſt *they* ſhould be involv'd in the Ruin pour'd upon the ungodly: Their Puniſhment is but *reſpited* for a *little* while, and at the great Aſſize God's Juſtice will have its full Courſe, and ſink 'em into everlaſting Ruin. And as the *Husbandman* may *obſerve* the Tares that are among his good Corn, and reſolve at length to bind 'em up in Bundles and burn them, tho' his prudential Care of the good Corn inclines him to let them alone till the *Harveſt*, and not pluck 'em up whilſt the good Corn is ſtanding and growing to Perfection, leſt it be rooted up together with them; So *God ſees* and reſolves in due Time to *puniſh* according to their Demerit the vile hypocritical Chriſtians, but in a wiſe and tender Regard for the ſafety of the *ſincerely* good, *with-holds* his Judgments during their Abode in the World, but will ſurely repay the wicked Wretches what they have deſerv'd, in the great Day of *Recompence*.

And this brings me to the *laſt* thing this Parable informs us of, namely, that though theſe vile unhappy Tares are forborn for a while, and let paſs without bearing any publick Marks of God's Diſpleaſure *here*; yet there ſhall moſt certainly be a Time of Diſcrimination, even at the great *Harveſt*: and then ſhall *all Men diſcern between the Righteous and the Wicked, between him that ſerveth God, and him that ſerveth him not.* Mal. 3. 18.

For, then will the great Husbandman the *Lord Jeſus*, as at the Time of Harveſt, ſay to his

his Angelical Reapers, *gather ye first together the Tares, and bind them in Bundles to burn them, but gather the Wheat into my Barn.* And accordingly they shall gather out of his Kingdom all that have been a *Scandal* to it, and under the Disguise of Christianity *have done Iniquity*, and *shall cast them into a Furnace of Fire, where shall be wailing and gnashing of Teeth: And then shall the Righteous shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father.*

That is, when the *Close* of the World shall come, and the whole intelligent Creation be met together at the Summons of the *Trump of God*; *Men* to receive their several *Sentences*, whether of *Absolution* or *Condemnation*, according to their several Deserts; and *Angels* to execute these Sentences: Then shall the *sincerely good* Christians *indeed* and in Truth, be plac'd by the blessed Angels of God on the *right* Hand of the *Glorious and Just* Judge, and after a Display of their excellent Piety and Charity to all the World, hear this joyful Sound, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepar'd for you from the Foundation of the World*; and then, be immediately *caught up into the Clouds to meet their dear Lord in the Air, and from thenceforth be for ever with him; and shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father*, having Crowns of *Eternal Glory* plac'd upon their *Heads*, and loud and rapturous *Halleluja's* in their *Mouths*. Whilst those miserable Wretches, that knew no more of Christianity

Chriſtianity than the *Name*, in whom Religion was only Shew and *Formality*, having no real Influence upon their *Lives*, and bringing forth no *Fruits* of Piety, whilſt *theſe*, ſhall find to their *Confuſion*, that God is not to be *mock'd*, and be plac'd on the *left* Hand as Veſſels of *Wrath*, and be doom'd to *depart* for ever from the *Fountain of Happineſs*, into eternal *Burnings, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels.*

Then will the good find by a *happy* Experience, that there is indeed a *Reward for the Righteous*, and that, however they were *laugh'd* at and *diſcourag'd here, their Labour is not in vain in the Lord.* And then will the Mock Hypocritical Chriſtians be ſadly aſſur'd, notwithſtanding all their Plea of having eaten and drank in the Preſence of the Judge and at his Table, and of his having taught in their Streets; that without *real* and ſubſtantial *Holineſs no Man ſhall ſee the Lord.* And inſtead of being receiv'd into their Maſter's Joy, for *cringing* and *fawning* upon him, and giving him magnificent Titles, *Lord, Lord, Jeſus, Saviour*, but heeding little his Commandments, they ſhall be rejected with *I know you not, depart from me ye Workers of Iniquity.*

And then will God be *juſtified* in the Face of the whole World, and found to be, not an *unconcern'd* Spectator of the Affairs of Mankind, but a *wiſe, all-knowing* and *juſt* Governour of the Univerſe: And though *Clouds and Darkneſs ſeem here to be round about him, yet Righte-*

Righteousness and Judgment are the Establishment of his Throne. Then will there be eternal *Joy* and *Exultation* of the blissful beautify'd Souls of the *Righteous*, and weeping and wailing and gnashing of Teeth in the wretched Companies of the *damn'd* for ever. *Behold, the Day cometh, saith the Prophet* Malachi, *that shall burn like an Oven, and all the Proud, and all they that do wickedly shall be as Stubble, and the Day that cometh, saith the Lord of Hosts, shall burn them up, that it shall leave them neither Root nor Branch.* Mal. 4. 1. *And in that Day shall Men seek Death and shall not find it, and shall desire to dye, and Death shall flee from them.* Rev. 9. 6.

And now for a *Conclusion* of the whole Matter: Since from this Parable of our Lord's, it appears, that though an *empty Shew* of Religion may pass well enough in this World, and meet with no open Discrimination or Punishment from God here; yet there shall most certainly be an *after* Reckoning, when all the *Thoughts* and *Intentions* of Men's hearts shall be *reveal'd*, and their vile *Hypocrisy* and *secret* Impiety laid *open* before *Men* and *Angels*, and an *irreversible* Doom of greatest Severity past upon them according to their Deservings, Since *this* is true, it nearly concerns us all to be Christians in *Reality*, as well as in *Name* and *Appearance*; to obey the *Commands* of Christ, as well as call him *Lord*, and to approve our selves true Disciples of this holy Institution

stitution, by leading our Lives *in all Holy Conversation and Godliness*; diligently endeavouring *to be found of this great Judge in Peace, without Spot and blameless.* Remembring *that God shall bring every Work into Judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil; and that the wicked shall go into everlasting Punishment, but the Righteous into Life Eternal.*

The PRAYER.

I.

O Holy Saviour, Jesus, from whom are deriv'd all our Possibilities of Salvation, the Means of Grace and the Hopes of Glory; but who expectest our Concarrence with thy gracious Endeavours for our Happiness, and for the Tryal of our Sincerity, permittest thine and our great Enemy to scatter his Hellish Injections where thou sowest thy Heavenly Doctrine: I earnestly intreat thee, so to assist me with thy Life-giving Spirit, that my Faith and Obedience, which thou hast made the Condition of my Happiness, may be so Vigorous and Active, as to manifest that I am thine, not only in Word and in Show, but in Deed and in Truth. Grant that I may ever esteem those inward Motions which I feel to a progressive Holiness, to be what indeed they are, thy gracious Endeavours to promote my Eternal Welfare; and may I always thankfully and chearfully imbrace and follow them. And whatever Thoughts

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and inclinations tend to discourage sincere Religion, and perswade to rest in the Formality of it; for thy Mercies Sake, help me to reject them with the greatest Abhorence and indignation, as the Endeavours of Satan to involve me in his own Ruin And since 'tis while we sleep that our great Adversary sowes these his Tares: Give me Grace, O Blessed Jesus, to awake to Righteousness, and rouze from my Thoughtless Inadvertency, and shake off my Dreams of Vanity, lest this Spiritual Slumber at length prove fatal and betray me into Eternal Death.

II.

Thou hast assured us, O Lord, to whom the Father hath committed all Judgment, that this Life is the only Time of our Probation: O therefore grant, that now, in this our Day, all we that name the Name of Christ may depart from Iniquity, and imbrace the things that belong to our Peace before they be hid from our Eyes! That by serious Consideration, we may make Religion our Choice, and adhere to it firmly, with all our Powers and Faculties, and be in Reality thy peculiar People, zealous of good Works; remembring thy blessed Words, Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I command? *And that, though here the Wicked go unpunish'd, it will not be always so, and at last Hypocrisy shall meet with its Deserts. And may I always so attend to the Dignity of my Nature, and the constant Inspection of thy Holy Angels and Glorious Self*

Self in all my Ways, as not to dare to play the Hypocrite in thy Preſence, who ſeeſt the inmoſt Secrets of my Heart, and be aſham'd to expoſe my Vileneſs to thoſe excellent Spirits, and reflect upon the Confuſion I ſhall be in at the Day of Judgment, when the Goat and the Swine ſhall be diſcover'd under the Profeſſion of a Chriſtian.

And, O that the Zeal and Alacrity of theſe miniſtring Spirits in thy Service, and for thy Glory, may put me upon a holy Emulation to do thy Will on Earth as it is done in Heaven! That ſo, when the great Harveſt ſhall come, and thou ſhalt ſay to the angelick Reapers, Gather ye together firſt the Tares, and bind them in Bundles to burn them; but gather my Wheat into my Barn, *I may find Mercy at that terrible Day, and be receiv'd to a Participation of the Glories of thy Heavenly Kingdom.*

Which grant, O bleſſed Jeſus, I moſt earneſtly beſeech thee. Amen.

PARABLE III.

Of the Pearl of great Price.

Matth. xiij. 45, 46.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a Merchant-man, seeking goodly Pearls:
Who, when he had found one Pearl of great Price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

BY *this*, and the Parable immediately before it, of *a Treasure hid in a Field, which, when a Man hath found he hideth, and for Joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that Field*: The transcendent Excellency of the Christian Religion above all things in the World, is represented: And that 'tis the greatest Wisdom to part with every Thing that this World can afford, all the Pleasures, Honours and Riches of it rather than be without the inward Power and Life of this holy Religion; which is a *Pearl of so great Price*, so immense a *Treasure*, that nothing here below can

can ſtand in Competition with it. 'Tis as *David* expreſſes it, *more to be deſir'd than Gold, yea, than much fine Gold*, Pſal. 19. 10 and he profeſſes that himſelf had *more Delight in God's Commandments than in all Manner of Riches*. And *Solomon* ſayes (almoſt in the Words of theſe Parables) *Happy is the Man that* findeth *Wiſdom*, or Religion; *for the* Merchandiſe *of it is better than the Merchandiſe of Silver, and the Gain thereof than of fine Gold*, Prov. 3 13, &c.

She is more precious than Rubies, *and all the things thou canſt deſire are not to be compar'd unto her: Length of Days is in her right Hand, and in her left Hand Riches and Honour: her Ways are Ways of Pleaſantneſs, and all her Paths are Peace.*

Such great things as theſe being ſpoken of Religion, by thoſe that beſt knew its Excellency; and the World being ſo very backward in the Belief of their Teſtimony, and ſo fooliſh as to prefer every *little* worldly Good before this ineſtimable Treaſure, to which, all that the *whole Creation* can afford is not comparable; and the *Conſequence* of this Deluſion being ſo *fatal*, no leſs than the eternal Ruin of both Body and Soul: It highly concerns us by due Conſideration to rectifie our Apprehenſions in this Matter, and no longer childiſhly doat upon empty *Gayes* and Trifles, and neglect what is of infinite Excellency, and the moſt *ſubſtantial* Good.

It is therefore the Design of this Discourse upon the Parable above recited, to weigh the Excellency of *Religion* against all that the *World* can afford in the Ballance of *Reason*, that upon a fair Experiment we may see which does preponderate, and accordingly be *convinc'd* which of the Two is most *worthy* our *Choice*: And then, if we still retain our Affection for the *World* against the Judgment of our *Reason* in behalf of *Religion*; we shall likewise be convinc'd that we act more like *Brutes* than *Men*, and that we deserve to feel the Consequences of our unreasonable and wicked Choice, and taste no other Happiness than what this *unsatisfying empty World* can afford; and in the next World be for ever *miserable*, because we *would* not be for ever *happy* when we *might*.

First then, let us see what the *Whole* that this *World* can afford will amount to. All that is in the World, St. *John* tells us, *is the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life*, 1 John 2. 16. *i. e.* to these Three may be reduc'd the Whole of what is valuable in the World: And by the *Lust of the Flesh* is meant *Pleasure* of all Sorts; by the *Lust of the Eye Riches*, great *Plenty* and *Abundance*; and by the *Pride of Life*, *Honour*, *Power* and *Dominion*. This is that *Trinity* which the generality of Men adore, and impatiently desire and place their greatest Happiness in the Enjoyment of; and of each of these Particulars,

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we will now enquire what they amount to, and conſequently what is the ſum total of the World.

And firſt, to obſerve the Apoſtles Method, we will begin with the *Luſts of the Fleſh*, or the *Pleaſures* of the World, and which are generally *firſt* in Mens Eſteem, and for which they are often content to part with the other Two. Now theſe may be rank'd in this Order, *viz.* the Pleaſures of *Luſt* and Uncleanneſs, of luxurious *Eating and Drinking*, and of great *Jollity and Mirth*; all agreeing in the Character of the Luſts of the Fleſh, that is, all highly grateful to the Deſires and Appetites of the Body. And in the firſt Place I obſerve this in general of all worldly Pleaſures, that the longer a Man *lives* to enjoy them, the more *inſipid* ſtill they grow to him; and that, not only upon Account of their own *empty Nature*, but by Reaſon of the Decays of our own *Faculties*, and conſequent *Diſability* to enjoy them. As old *Barzillai* ſaid to *David*; *Can I diſcern between Good and Evil?* &c. 2 *Sam.* 19. 35. when he invited him to the Pleaſures of his Court. And what Happineſs can be expected from that which is very unſatisfying in its own Nature, and which, were it *not* after a few Years we ſhall be incapable of enjoying? But to be more *particular*: As for the Pleaſures of *Luſt* and *Uncleanneſs*, whatever Mens *Expectations* may be of receiving great Satisfaction from them, they can't but

find by their Experience, that there is much of *Disappointment* in 'em, and the Pleasure much greater in *Imagination* than *Reality*: They are indeed *deceitful* Lusts, and often make Men *miserable*, even *here*, but never happy. And for the Truth of this (that it may not be look'd upon as a thing only *said*, not *prov'd*, and the cinical Conclusion of a frozen dispirited Student, whose narrow Course of Life has made him a Stranger to such Sort of Enjoyments, and caus'd him to give a worse Character of them than they deserve) I shall vouch the Testimony of *Solomon*, who fill'd the Throne of a rich and flourishing Kingdom, and was accountable to none but *God* for Actions of this Nature, and his Desires perfectly without any *humane* Restraint; and who made it his Business to find out what was the greatest Happiness of Man in this World, and *whatsoever his Eyes desir'd he kept not from them*; *he with-held not his Heart from any Joy*; and who, amongst other Delights, had great Numbers of *Wives* and *Concubines*, to the Number of *Seven Hundred Wives* that were *Princesses*, and *Three Hundred Concubines*, 1 Kin. 11. 30. and these the fairest, doubtless, that could be met with: Variety enough, one would think, to take off all possibility of *loathing* and desire of *Change*. But now, what says *Solomon* after so *full* and *uncontroul'd* Enjoyment of these carnal Pleasures? Why truly in the very beginning of his Book of *Proverbs*, Chap. 2. 18, 19. he tells

tells the World, that the *Houſe of the Strange*, or Whoriſh *Woman inclineth unto Death, and her Paths unto the Dead: None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the Paths of Life.* And *Prov.* 5. 3. *The Lips of a ſtrange Woman drop as an honey-comb, and her Mouth is ſmoother than Oyl; but her End,* or the End of having to do with her, *is bitter as Wormwood, ſharp as a two-edged Sword.* Very frequent are his Invectives againſt this Vice, and deliver'd with more than ordinary Earneſtneſs: And in the 7th Chapter of *Eccleſiaſtes* (the Book of his Recantations) he publickly declares, that he *finds* (as by his own *Experience*) *He finds more bitter than Death, the Woman whoſe Heart is Snares and her Hands as Bands; whoſo pleaſeth God ſhall eſcape from her, but the Sinner ſhall be taken by her.* Ver. 26. As if 'twere a *peculiar* Providence of God, to protect a *good* Man from falling into ſo great a Miſchief, and that he ſuffers the wicked to be enſnar'd by it as a ſevere Puniſhment and great Expreſſion of his *Diſpleaſure* And in the next Verſe, *Behold, ſays the Preacher, this have I found, counting one by one to find out the Account, which yet my Soul ſeeketh, but I find not: One Man among a Thouſand have I found, but a Woman among all thoſe have I not found.* That is, he did at laſt meet with a *Man* that anſwer'd his Expectations as a Friend or faithful Servant: But among all his *Concubines*, not *one* but who baulk'd and

disappointed his fond Hopes of Happiness from the Enjoyment of her, and *depriv'd* him of more Satisfaction than she gave him.

And thus we see, from the Confession of *Solomon* himself, who gratified his *carnal* Appetite to the *full*, and experienc'd the utmost of what *Lust* and *Wantonness* could afford; that this sort of Pleasure amounts to no more than this, *Dishonour* and *Disappointment* always, and not seldom *Diseases* and *Death*.

Let us now proceed to enquire what the Pleasures of *luxurious Eating*, and *intemperate Drinking* will amount to. All that it can *pretend* to is the Gratification of the *Taste* and *Palate*: For, as for true *Nourishment*, High Feeding falls far short of more *ordinary* Diet; and as for refreshing and *cherishing* the Spirits, a *moderate* Quantity of Wine is sufficient, and what is more than *that*, ends in a Fit of Madness, and *impoverishes* Nature. Now, the Pleasures of the *Palate*, make the *best* of them, are of very *short* Continuance, no sooner tasted but they vanish; and the Stomach will not *bear* a long *Repetition* of this Pleasure, and is soonest *cloy'd* and *surfeited* with what is of the *richest* Gust and Relish: And the *Inconveniences* that attend this *short-liv'd* and very *imperfect* Pleasure, are *great* and of very *long* Continuance. For, suppose a Mans Revenues to be so large that he can bear the *Expence* of Luxury, without weakening his *Fortune* in the least, and so that very

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uſual ill Conſequence of it, cannot in this Caſe be charg'd upon it, yet others full as great may. As firſt, the more a Man *indulges* his Palate, the harder he will find it to be pleas'd, and at length 'twill grow ſo *troubleſomely* nice, that its *Diſguſts* will be more frequent than its *Pleaſure*; and ſo, inſtead of procuring a conſtant *Gratification* of the Palate, Luxury is the ready Way to make a Man *diſreliſh* almoſt every thing: Which muſt needs make his Life a continual *Vexation* and Uneaſineſs; and a *Plowman* with his coarſe Fare, and no other *Sauce* to it but a *good Stomach*, will experience far greater and more *laſting* Pleaſure in *eating and drinking*, than the greateſt *Epicure* in the World. And therefore, Luxury is indeed the *wrong* Way to procure an intire Gratification of the Palate, and *deſtroys* what it pretends to *create*. Another very ill Conſequence of Luxury is, that it mightily weakens and *impairs Health*, and makes a Man a *living Hoſpital*, full of Diſeaſes, and very often cuts his Days off in the *Midſt*. And thus does an *over-Indulgence* to the Body cruciate and deſtroy it, and by an extravagant Care to *pleaſe* the Palate, Men bring upon themſelves a Neceſſity of taking ſuch *Medicinal* Compoſitions, as are abundantly more *Nauſeous* to it, than ever the moſt artificial Diſhes or richeſt Wines were *grateful*.

And by this Time we perceive what Luxurious Eating and Drinking amounts to; truly

truly no more than this, a very *short imperfect Pleasure*, attended with *great and durable ill Consequences*, which abundantly out-weigh the *Pleasure*, and would do so were it *greater* and more *lasting* than it is.

Another Desire of the Flesh is *Mirth and Jollity*, a thoughtless Course of Life, spent in *Recreations*, in Laughter, and an *Airy* Facetious Way of Conversation; and this is very taking with abundance of People, and he counted the happiest Man that can spend his Days in this Manner, and has little else to do. Well then, suppose a Man so intirely disengag'd from the Fatigues of Business, as to have his Time wholly at his own Disposal; suppose him to be of a brisk lively Temper, and free from all Care and Trouble, and that he has the Conversation of such as are as sprightly as himself, so that the Day seems too short for their Mirth and Pleasantry, their Pastimes and Recreations: Suppose all this, that is, suppose a Man to have all of this Kind of Pleasure that the World can afford, we shall find upon a nearer View, that there is as great an *Alloy* here as in the Instances before mention'd.

Solomon, who was a very competent Judge in this Matter, and for a considerable Time made Jollity his Business, and tasted as much of it as 'tis possible for a Man to do; was so much of this Mind, as to pronounce it not only *Vanity*, but *Vexation of Spirit*. He gave himself

himſelf wholly up to *Mirth* (as he tells us, *Prov.* 2. 1, &c.) and the Pleaſures of *Wine*, with *agreeable Company*: He planted beautiful Gardens, Vineyards and Groves, interwoven with artificial Streams; to improve the Reliſh of thoſe his Delights, and as the Crown of all, he had all Sorts of *Muſick* attending him, both Vocal and Inſtrumental; ſo that he had whatever his Heart could deſire to make himſelf happy this Way if this could do it. And what was the Reſult of all this? Why truly, a few ſerious reflecting Thoughts diſcover'd to him, that *All was but Vanity and Vexation of Spirit. I ſaid of Laughter, it is mad, and of Mirth, what doth it?* And what doth it indeed? 'Tis *profitable* for nothing, and when *exceſſive*, and attended too *extravagantly*, 'tis *naturally* as well as *morally* an Evil; It *unmans* and effeminates the *Soul*, and *diſpirits* and hebetates the *Body*. The moſt *profuſe Laughter* ends in a *Sigh*, and *Uneaſineſs*, and looks much like *Madneſs*, and is a certain Indication of *Folly*. A *decent chearfulneſs* is commendable upon many Accounts; but to make a Trade of Jollity, to be always upon the *Laugh*, and ſpend the *greateſt* Part of a Man's *Time* in Recreations and *Diverſions*; as 'tis a very *childiſh* thing, and looks much like the Behaviour of *Naturals* and *Changelings*, ſo 'tis a very *uneaſie* thing too, and grows from a *Pleaſure* into a *Toil* and *Burthen*. Witneſs ſuch Perſons frequent ſhifting and changing

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one Diversion for another, how at a *Loss* sometimes they are, how to dispose of their Time, and what Sport to go to next, and how quickly tir'd they are with their idle Employment? And, it may be very truly said, there is *less* of Pleasure in a Course of Life that is always *hunting* after Pleasure, and intent upon nothing else, than in a more severe serious Way of living, which *but now and then*, and *sparingly* tastes of Mirth and Recreations, and soon returns to things of more Weight and Concern. And the Reason is, those *light* Sort of Enjoyments are so empty of what will gratify a *Rational Soul*, that they presently grow *flat* and *insipid*, and become *tedious* rather than *diverting*, when *too long* dwelt upon, and suck'd too *dry*. A *short transient* Enjoyment is most agreeable to their *fading* perishing Nature; and as he enjoys the Fragrancy of a *Rose* both *more* and *longer*, who smells of it *gently* and with frequent *Intermissions*, than he that uses it more *roughly*, and presses it too *constantly* and too *hard*; so he experiences much *more* of the *Sweet* of *Mirth and Pleasantry* who but *seldom* and *moderately* uses it, than he that makes it his *Business*, and follows it as *close* as others do their *Callings*. Even in *Laughter* (when extravagant) says the Wise King, *The Heart is sorrowful, and the End of that Mirth is Heaviness*, Eccles. 7. 2. Nay, he says, *'tis better to go to the House of Mourning than to the House of Feasting*; for that may

may have some substantial *good Effect* upon a Man, *Death being the End of all Men;* and the *living*, at such serious Times, may be inclin'd to *lay it to Heart*; whereas *Jollity* and *Mirth* wholly evaporate into *Folly*, and leave nothing behind them that is any Way *profitable*, unless it be *Repentance*. Sorrow and Seriousness make Men *consider*, and become receptive of wise Instructions; but a light, *frothy* Temper, both *exposes* a Man's Folly, and fatally prevents his growing *Wiser*: It shews that he is a Fool, and that he is like to *continue* so. For, *as the crackling of Thorns under a Pot, so is the Laughter of a Fool*; there is much of *Noise* in it, but it serves to no other purpose than to *shame himself*. And thus we have seen what the Heighth of *Mirth and Jollity* amounts to; namely, *Disappointment, Vexation and Uneasiness, Shame* and *Vanity, Madness* and *Folly*.

Having thus summ'd up the true Value of *one* of the *Three* things in which consists the Happiness of the World, the *Lusts of the Flesh*, or those things which more immediately gratifie our *bodily Appetites*; let us now look into the

Second, which is call'd by the Apostle, the *Lust of the Eyes*; that is, *Riches* and great Abundance of *this Worlds Good*, such as *ample Possessions, magnificent Structures, a Splendid Equipage, glorious Apparel*, and the like: Which are call'd the *Lust of the Eyes*, because

cause 'tis the Sense of *seeing* that these things affect with the greatest Pleasure.

Now, suppose a Man to have *all* of this Nature that the *World* can help him to; suppose he has Riches enough to answer all these things, to *provide* all this Splendor and Magnificence, and to *support* and *maintain* it: What more will it amount to, than, as *Solomon* expresses it, *the beholding of it with our Eyes*? Eccles. 5. 11.

For, as for great Treasures of *Gold and Silver*, though they may procure many things to delight the *Eye* and please the *Fancy*, yet the Man that hath 'em remains still as *Nature made him*, none of the Powers or Faculties either of his Soul or Body receive any *Improvement* nor Alteration unless it be for the *worse*. But Mony will erect *magnificent* and stately *Buildings*, 'twill purchase *rich Furniture*, and all that Art can do to adorn and beautify them. 'Tis true, it will so; but, will those stately Structures preserve a Man better from the Injuries of the *Air* and *Weather* than more ordinary Houses? Shall a Man *sleep better* in a *costly* than a *meaner* Bed? And, will a Fever handle him more gently that lies within Curtains of *Velvet*, and has his Chamber adorn'd in the most costly Manner, that one that is contented with a cleanly Meanness? If not, still 'tis the *Eye* that receives all the *Pleasure*.

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As for the ſplendid *Equipage* of the Men of great Poſſeſſions, a Croud of Attendants following them, in gay Liveries, glittering Coaches, and the like; this may pleaſe the *Eye* too; but what more does it effect? 'Tis but Two or Three of thoſe Attendants that can be *ſerviceable*, the reſt are own'd to be for *State* only, and are kept for little elſe than to eat and drink and be troubleſome; and the Experience of all Men will tell us, that he is the happieſt Man that ſtands in need of the *feweſt* Servants, and retains no more than he ſtands in *need of*. As for fine Coaches and glorious Apparel, if *Gold* upon a Coach, and *coſtly Trappings* would make a Journey more ſafe and eaſie, and if rich Cloths would keep one *Warmer* or laſt *longer*, or be leſs *troubleſome* than a more ordinary Habit, there might be ſomething ſaid for them: But, ſince there is nothing of this in them, nay, rather they are *leſs* ſerviceable to the Ends they were at firſt deſign'd for, and that *over-Niceneſs* and *Curioſity* in *Dreſs* or any thing elſe is the Occaſion of much *Diſturbance* and *Uneaſineſs*: The beholding theſe gay things with the *Eye*, is all that is conſiderable in them. And, what does the *beholding* of all theſe ſplendid Sights amount to? Is there any *through* and *laſting* Pleaſure in it, any thing that will make a Man *happy*, or ſo much as *promote* his Happineſs? Why truly, *Solomon*, who experienc'd all of this Nature to the *full*, gives

gives us this Account of it; *He that loveth Silver shall not be satisfied with Silver, nor he that loveth Abundance with Increase*, Eccl. 2. 4, 11. *When Goods are increased they are increased that eat them, and what Good is there to the Owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their Eyes?* Eccl. 5. 10. A Pleasure very empty and unsatisfying (*for the Eye is not satisfied with seeing*) and which their meanest *Servant* may have as well as they.

Content is least of all in the Breasts of Persons of the *highest Rank*; he that has much would still have *more*, and is in frequent Fears of *losing* what he has; for Riches are known to be very *uncertain*, and unaccountably take to themselves Wings and fly away: and to be in fear of *losing* Riches, and yet *dissatisfied* in the *Possession* of them, carries much more of *Uneasiness* with it, than the *beholding* of them with ones *Eyes* does of *Pleasure*; and a Stranger or a Servant may take not only as *much*, but *more* Pleasure in the Sight, that has none of the inward *Discontent*, than the Proprietor and Master that *hath*. So true is that of the Apostle, *They that will be rich fall into Temptation and a Snare, and pierce themselves through with divers Sorrows*; 1. Tim. 6. 9, 10. and *Contentment* with only Food and Raiment is a much greater Happiness. To so very little in reality does arise the *Second* thing, in which consists the Happiness of the *World*, the Gratification of the *Lust of the Eyes*; even to nothing

nothing but *Diſſatisfaction* and *Diſquiet, Vanity and Vexation of Spirit.*

Come we now to examine the *third* Part of this World's Treaſure, the *Pride of Life*, or, *Honour, Power and Dominion.* And very fitly is this ſtil'd the *Pride of Life*, it being the Aim of moſt men to be *great*, to *command and govern*, and to have much of Honour and *Reſpect* paid to them, and in this they *pride* themſelves more than in any other Worldly Good that they poſſeſs. But what is there in all this that a Man can juſtly value at ſo high a Rate? Suppoſe a Man to be Monarch of the *whole World*, and to be without Controul from any one on Earth, and to give Laws to every Man beſides; ſuppoſe many inferiour Princes tributary to him, and that he is honoured like a Mortal God; ſuppoſe all this, yet, however glorious it may appear at a *diſtance*, we ſhall find, upon a cloſer Inſpection that *this* likewiſe is *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit.*

For, as for even an *univerſal* Dominion, unleſs the Subjects were as willing to *obey*, as the Monarch is deſirous to *govern*, a *Catholick* Crown would ſit as uneaſie, nay, *more* ſo, than that of leſſer Princes. The further a Man's Dominion extends, the more Difficulties in Government will occur, the more ambitious and diſcontented Spirits will there be to tame and keep in order; the more ſecret Conſpiracies and Underminings of Men aggriev'd *and*

Misoblig'd, and that are as desirous of Government as he that sits in the Throne can be: And which, will often break out to shake and discompose, if not to overturn the present Establishment. And the more extensive a Princes Dominions are, the more must there be employ'd in the Government of them, and those, Men of different Interests and Inclinations, *jealous* of one another, and *envious* at the *Supreme*, and more ready to carve for themselves and advance their own Families, than sincerely to endeavour the Prosperity of their Master. This is found very true, and the Occasion of much Trouble and Disquiet, to Princes that have Affairs more in their *own View* than this *universal* Monarch can be supposed to have; and therefore much more dangerously must *he* sit than *they*, and receive much more *Disquietude* and Trouble if he takes *Notice* of the Motion of his great Orb; and if he does *not*, where is the Pleasure of governing?

So that the most *ample* Dominion is thickest set with Thorns and Briars while enjoyed, and in continual Danger of a Ruin; which must perplex him that is *sensible* of it, with Numberless Fears and Jealousies, and anxious Thoughts how to secure his Throne; And he that is careless and *unsensible*, and leaves the Fatigues of Government to *others*, and spends his Days in nothing but Ease and Luxury; is an Emperor in Title only, and may soon, for any thing he knows, be not so much

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as *that*. The *one* leads a Life of *Vanity*, the *other* of *Vexation of Spirit*.

That 'tis *eaſier* to *obey* than to *govern*, is an uſual and very true Saying; and would be ſo, were Thrones not near ſo *ſlippery* as they are; and I am ſure 'tis very much happier for a Man never to have *had* ſuch Height of Power and Dominion, than ever to ſee himſelf thrown down and laid in the Duſt. The very *Danger* of ſo great a Fall, is enough to fill ones Breaſt with great *Diſorder*, ſo great as that all the Gauderies of Grandeur ſhall loſe their Taſte, and become *inſipid* to him, and *actually* to fall (as many glorious Princes have already done) is the greateſt Miſery that can be experienc'd upon Earth.

The ſhort is, Empire and Dominion, fancy it how great ſoever, is at *beſt* very *troubleſome* and *diſquieting*; and ſo *uncertain*, as that it not ſeldom ends in the very *Depth* of *Ruin*. And as for the *Honour* that goes along with it, *glorious Titles*, *low Obeiſance*, and the like; all of this Nature is ſo perfectly *empty*, and utterly ineffective of any thing that's truly *good* and *Profitable* to a Man, that 'tis of all things the moſt *deſpicable* and of leaſt Regard: And though 'tis fit Inferiours ſhould pay it where 'tis due, yet unleſs an inward Veneration of the *Mind*, attends that outward Reſpect of the *Body*, a great Man is ſo far from being *honoured* by it, that 'tis the greateſt *Mockery* and *Abuſe* that can be. And becauſe

no great Man can tell whether he is *inwardly* reverenced or no, neither can force any Man so to honour him against his Will; 'tis a very great Weakness for him to set any great *Value* upon *outward* Respect, which for ought he knows, nay, in all likelyhood may be, an *Affront* rather than an *Honour* to him. And this is what *Honour*, *Power* and *Dominion* amount to.

Having thus given in an Impartial Account, and that confirmed by the experience of *Solomon*, who enjoy'd it all to the *Full*, of the Sum *Total* of what *this World* can afford, that can pretend to be of any Worth and Esteem; by examining the Three Particulars in which is contained all that is valuable in it; namely, *the Lust of the Flesh*, *the Lust of the Eye*, *and the Pride of Life*: Let us now weigh *Religion* against it, and see which does *preponderate*, which is the most *weighty* and *substantial* Good, and consequently, whether the *Merchant* in the Parable did *wisely* or no, in selling *all that he had* that he might purchase *this Pearl*, and be Master of this *Treasure*? And we shall consider Religion in a two-fold Respect, with Relation to *this* World as well as the other.

And first, as for the Value of Religion with Relation to *this* World: what is of greater Esteem than *Peace* and *Quietness*, *Contentment* and Satisfaction of *Mind*, a *Long and Healthy Life here*, and a comfortable *expectation* of a much *better endless* Life in the Regions of *Glory*?

Glory? And all this, *Religion* is the only ſure Way to attain.

What the World it *ſelf* affords we have ſeen cannot make us happy in it; its Riches, and Pleaſures, and Honours, and Power, and Dominion are empty and unſatisfying; and indeed, the Parent of nothing but *Vexation of Spirit*: And therefore I ſhall wave the Enquiry how far Religion is conducive to *theſe* things; though it might be made apparent, that this is the ſureſt Way even to become *rich*, to live *Pleaſantly*, and with *Honour* and *Reſpect*: and as for Dominion, to govern a Mans *ſelf*, which Religion only teaches, is more than to govern the *World*.

Now, as to Peace and Quietneſs, which are Bleſſings of the firſt Magnitude, and indeed give a Reliſh to every thing elſe; for without them neither Riches, nor Honour, nor even Health and Life it ſelf ſits eaſie: That Religion is the only ſure Way to procure theſe great Bleſſings, and that both in *Private* and in *Publick*, Abroad with others, and at Home in a Mans own Breaſt, will ſoon be evident.

As for Peace and Quietneſs in our Intercourſe with *others*, Religion does manifeſtly tend to procure that, upon theſe two Accounts. 1. Becauſe it forbids the *offering* any Injuries. 2. Becauſe it forbids *returning* any. Now that which embroils the World, and is the Occaſion of all Contention, being the *doing* and *Retaliating* Harms and ill Turns, and

Religion so strictly commanding us to love our Neighbours as our selves, to do *to* others nothing but what in like Circumstances we would be willing to receive *from* others; and to *forgive* if any have done injuriously by us, as we hope to be forgiven by God at the Day of Judgment: 'Tis plain that were our holy Religion sincerely embrac'd, and had its due Influence upon the Minds of Men, the World might (in the Literal Sense of the Words) *beat their Swords into Plough-Shares, and their Spears into Pruning Hooks, and need not learn War any more*; *nothing would* then *hurt in God's Holy Mountain*: And the World would be what God at first design'd it; a Paradice of Happiness, and Mankind a Family of Love. And as for Peace and Quiet at *Home*, in a Mans own Breast, and without which all other Peace would lose its Relish, Religion is the only Way to attain that Blessing. For as long as there is such a thing as Conscience (which there will be as long as a Man is in any Possibility of Salvation) it will do its Office freely and impartially, and lash the Soul that sins, as often as it sins, and fill it full of Horror and Confusion and dreadful Apprehensions of the just Vengeance of God at the Day of Retribution. *There is no Peace, saith my God, to the wicked; but their Souls are like the troubled Sea which cannot rest, and whose Waters cast up Mire and Dirt.* But a *good* Mans Breast is quiet and serene, full of the Joys of Innocence,

and

and the Applauſes of a *Conſcience void of Offence both towards God and Man.*

And as Peace and Quietneſs, ſo *Contentment* and *Satisfaction* of Mind, is the natural Product of Religion, and of that only.

Without Contentment of Mind, *no* Condition how good ſoever in its ſelf, is pleaſing, and *with* it, *every* Condition is. For Happineſs conſiſts in the *Proportion* of the *Object* to the *Deſire*, and he that has the *whole* of what this World can afford, if he deſires ſtill *more*, and thinks his preſent Condition not good enough, is by many Degrees leſs happy than he that muſt *drudge* for his living, but yet is *contented* with his Lot, Happineſs conſiſts not in *Abundance*; he only is indeed a *happy* Man, that is ſo wiſe as to enjoy his preſent Portion, and knows how *patiently* to endure a *worſe* Condition, and dreads a baſe and wicked Action, however gainful and advantagious it may be, even worſe than Death. And he'll for ever be a Slave that can't be ſatisfied with a little.

But the *contented* Man is always eaſie under his preſent Lot; and if his Fortune will not *riſe* to what he could *deſire*, he will bring his Deſires *down* to his *Fortune*; and ſo be ſure of Happineſs, becauſe by this means his Deſires and his Fortune bear a due Proportion to one another. And truly, ſo various are the Turns of Fortune here, ſo many unexpected Accidents that make great Changes for the worſe in Mens Circumſtances of Life, and which 'tis utterly

out of their Power to have any Influence upon so as to amend; that were there not this Remedy of making our Minds *comply* with the Event, and taking out the Sting and Venom of it by Acquiescence and Contentment and *Contraction* of our *Desires*, Man would be the most miserable Creature upon the Face of the Earth. But he that has learned and can apply this Remedy, whatever he may suffer from without, has a Power still ready of turning it into *Good*; and though he can't prevent the *Accident*, yet he can prevent its doing him a *Mischief*.

Now this excellent Remedy for the Calamities of Life, Religion best of all teaches us. For in the first place it teaches us that God is the great Governour of the World, and with the exactest Wisdom, and Justice, and Goodness disposes all things; and consequently, that all Events are as they should be, and upon the whole Account ordered for the *Best*: For there is no Possibility of *amending* what is done with infinite Wisdom, and Justice, and Goodness. And secondly it teaches us that our *Interest* does least of all lie in *this* World, where we are but *Strangers* and *Foreigners*, and are to continue but for a *little while*; and that our *Treasure* and *Inheritance* is in *Heaven*, which is our Native Country, and to which e're long we shall be recall'd, and our Glory and Happiness there be the more increas'd, as we have more patiently and contentedly submitted to God's

God's Pleaſure here upon Earth. And a hearty thorough Perſwaſion of theſe two things, will certainly teach a Man *to know*, with St. *Paul*, *How to abound and how to want, and in every Condition to be content.* And for this, Chriſtianity gives the cleareſt *Evidence*, even the Word of God himſelf, *who cannot lye*; as no Man can be to learn that has read the Scriptures.

But *Irreligion* on the contrary, is the great *Deſtroyer* of Content, and fills the Soul with continual Vexations, and makes every croſs Accident doubly evil by Impatience. For firſt, the ungodly have not *God in all their Thoughts*, are wholly taken up with *ſecond Cauſes*, and look upon things as the Effect of *Chance* and *Fortune*; and ſo when Croſſes come upon them, or *ill Fortune* as they call it, they grow querulous and out of all Patience; and as for *Divine Providence*, that's wholly unregarded, unleſs it be to *revile* it and impiouſly to call in queſtion the Goodneſs and Juſtice of its Diſpoſals. And ſo, *that* which in Affliction is the greateſt Cordial of all, Irreligion either wholly *deprives* the Soul of, or turns it into Poiſon; and inſtead of *diſarming* a Misfortune by humble Submiſſion to the infinitely wiſe, and juſt, and good Diſpoſals of the great Governour of all things, adds a thouſand ſharper ſtings to it, and makes that become *intolerable*, which Religion would have made to ſit *light* and *eaſie*.

Again, Content is deſtroyed by Irreligion, becauſe

becauſe it perſwades Men that their whole Intereſt lies here below; either by making them believe there is no ſuch thing as another World, or elſe by engaging them ſo faſt to this, as to hinder their attending to any thing beyond this Life: And the Effect of this is great eagerneſs in acquiring theſe lower goods, impatient Deſires of ſtill more and more of the World, as that in which is concentred their whole Happineſs. And what elſe can be the Conſequence of this amidſt the great Uncertainties that attend theſe ſublunary things, but a World of Trouble and Diſcontent, anſwerable to thoſe numerous croſs Accidents and Diſappointments which every Condition is full of from the higheſt to the loweſt? Every unlucky Hit to ſuch Men is like a Dagger ſtabbing to the very Heart; for that which a Man looks upon as his *chief Good* he can by no means endure to have leſſened and impaired: And the World being ſo full of ſuch vexatious Miſhaps, how full of Wounds muſt be the Spirit of an ungodly Worldling!

And as *Content*, ſo *Satisfaction* of Mind, which is much more than a ſubmiſſive *Acquieſcence* in our preſent Condition, and ſuppoſes a Happineſs that is *compleat* and *full*. This is a Bleſſing which nothing but ſincere Religion can ever make the Soul experience: And he only that has learned to make God the chief Object of his Affections and Deſires, can indeed know what *Satisfaction* is.

For

For every thing beſides God is unſatisfying, becauſe flitting and momentary, and very imperfect, and empty of that infinite Good which is the only adequate Object of that infinite Deſire of Happineſs which is in the Soul of Man. This is the Reaſon that Men are ſo conſtantly diſappointed in their Expectation of Happineſs from the Enjoyment of this World's Good; let them continually have what they deſire (which yet is too much to be rationally ſuppoſed of any Man) and enjoy it fully and without Controul, yet ſtill there will be ſomething wanting to compleat their Happineſs, ſomething that they deſire ſtill further; and ſo the Soul is continually baulk'd of her Expectation, and ſtill at a Loſs for Happineſs, and continual Longings and Deſires, and as continual Diſappointments, are her Portion in this World. And what's more uneaſie and vexatious than ſuch a Condition as this? What more deplorable than even by Fruition it ſelf to be made unhappy? What other Refuge has the miſerable Soul in this Caſe, than to take off her Affections from theſe empty Nothings here below, and as Religion directs, fix them upon him who is the *Supreme Good*, and will abide the Teſt of an *Eternal* Fruition. In the Enjoyment of *him* muſt needs be *Infinite Satisfaction*, becauſe there is no real Good that we can poſſibly deſire, but is in the Divine Nature in the higheſt Degree of Excellency and Perfection; and that not only for a Time, but

to

to all Eternity. All the Capacities of the Soul must needs be fill'd with an infinite Good, and intirely rest in it as in the Center of Happiness.

Thirdly, Religion is of very great value with respect to this World, because 'tis so greatly conducive to a *long* and *healthy* Life in it.

Long Life and Health is that which all People naturally covet, and is indeed a very great Blessing; and that not only because the longer Men live and the more vigorous they are, the longer and more fully they enjoy, or at least hope to enjoy the good things of this World (which yet with too many is the main Consideration) but likewise and *chiefly* because they have more Time and greater Opportunities to provide for the Happiness of the Eternal Life to come, and heap up still greater Treasures of Glory in the Kingdom of Heaven. Now this great Blessing nothing is more likely to help a Man to than Religion. For,

First, it engages Men to live regularly and temperately, moderates the Appetites of eating and drinking, and curbs the exorbitant Desires of the flesh; and by allowing no more than is necessary to the Comfortable Support of Nature, makes no Provision for those many destructive *Diseases* which are always the Attendants of *Excess*. How many of the meaner Sort by *Labour* and *course* Fare protract their Days, than of the Rich who live in Ease and Luxury? And the Reason is plain, because the poor Man's scanty Fortune will not

not allow him to *exceed*, but keeps him within the Bounds of Moderation and Temperance, and forces him to be content with a *little*; whereas the rich have many and great Temptations to Luxury and Exceſs, and ſeldom are ſo Religious as to *reſiſt* them, and ſo too frequently feel the ſad Effects of Intemperance and live out but half their Days. But now, *Religion* is a kind of *Voluntary Poverty*, and helps Men to all the *Bleſſings* of a mean Condition, though rich and out of Danger of the *Sting* of it; and by introducing *Temperance* and *Moderation* into the Families of the Wealthy, brings with it Health and long Life, which otherwiſe would ſeldom be found but in the Cottages of the Poor.

Again, Religion is greatly conducive to a long and healthy Life, becauſe it regulates the *Paſſions*, keeps the Soul quiet and in a *Calm*; which has no little Influence upon the Health and Welfare of the Body. That the Paſſions of the Mind do very much affect the Body, is undeniable; and when they are *exceſſive*, nothing more ſhakes and diſcompoſes the whole Man. Even *Joy*, which one would think ſhould be Innocent enough, has ſometimes been ſo violent as to overcharge Perſons and leave them Dead, and *Grief* has been often fatal, and *Envy* is the worſt Sort of Conſumption, and leaves viſible Tokens of it upon the Countenance, and *Love* has had many Martyrs, and *Anger* is a great Impoveriſher of the Animal

Animal Spirits, and oftentimes makes a Man his own Executioner, and engages in such Scuffles and hot Inconsiderate Actions, as not seldom end in *Wounds* and *Death*. Every Excess of Passion of what kind soever, is naturally a great *Impairer* of Health at least, and the often Repetitions of it, the ready Way to *destroy* it; Nature not being able to bear such violent Concussions long, without being much weaken'd and shatter'd by them: Like the Walls of a Castle, which, how strong soever, will receive Damage by every furious Battery, and unless reliev'd, must at length fall before the Cannons Irresistible Force.

But now, Religion prevents all this Mischief; and by regulating and reducing to *Moderation* these Passions of the Soul, makes the Mind calm and quiet, and keeps the Spirits in an *Æquipoise*; and the Body consequently is undisturb'd, feels no Violence, nor is hurried on to dangerous and destructive Actions; but Nature goes on *evenly* in making Provision for its Health and Support, and it enjoys its Strength and Beauty as in the Times of Quietness and Peace.

In the last Place, a comfortable Expectation of a much better and endless Life in the Regions of Glory, can spring from nothing but sincere Religion; and therefore Religion is of very great Value with Respect to *this* World. For what can be of greater value and more to be desired in this Valley of Tears, this World

of

of Sin and Sorrow, and Ignorance, Vexation, and Diſappointment, than to have a well grounded Hope that 'twill not be *always* ſo with us? That there will be a Time when all Tears ſhall be wip'd from our Eyes, and Sin and Miſery be at an End for ever? That we ſhall one Day be diſentangled from the Clog of Fleſh, the Priſon Doors ſet open, and our captiv'd Souls ſet free, and with Joy unſpeakable and full of Glory, return to the great Father of Spirits, and with the full Vigour of all their Faculties contemplate and enjoy the only ſatisfying Good? That inſtead of Floods of *Tears*, there ſhall then be Rivers of *Pleaſures* flowing in upon us to all Eternity; Halleluja's inſtead of Groans and mournful Accents; the Triumphant Rejoycings of Eternally Beatified Spirits inſtead of the bitter Complaints of miſerable Mortals; and in a word, *Love* in its Perfection inſtead of Quarrels and Diſcontents, Envy and Hatred, and Malice, and Revenge, and all the dire Attendants of them? That inſtead of ſpiritual *Blindneſs* and *Ignorance* of the moſt *concerning* Truths (for here we know but in Part, and ſee through a Glaſs darkly) we ſhall e're long, be admitted to contemplate *Truth it ſelf*, and *know as we are known*, and ſhall ſee *God as he is*, and in him all things? For *God is Light*. What can be more valuable than ſuch a chearing expectation as this! How will it ſweeten all the Troubles of this Mortal Life and be a ſenſible

sible Foretaste of the Glory that shall hereafter be revealed!

But now, nothing can create such a Hope as this but *sincere Religion*; for God is infinitely *pure and holy*, and into his Presence no *unclean* thing can enter. And 'tis expresly said in the Revelations of his Will, *That without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord.* A *wicked* Mans Breast that is not *seared*, can be full of nothing but the dire Reflections of an enrag'd Conscience, and dreadful forebodings of the Wrath to come. The Miseries he feels in *this* World are but as the Beginnings of his Eternal Sorrows; and while he *continues* in his Rebellion against God, he can expect nothing but new Expresses of his Indignation here, and to be doom'd to the Portion of the Devil and his Angels at the Day of Judgment. He only that has liv'd piously in this World can with any Comfort think upon a future State: But to him that has led this *First* Life by the Rule of Religion, and serv'd his Maker in Sincerity of Heart, no Joy comparable to that which he experiences when he thinks of being dissolv'd, and conducted to the Embraces of his Saviour, in the Kingdom of Heaven, where he shall be for ever with him, and unspeakably happy in the Joy of his dear Lord.

And thus much for the Value of Religion with Relation to this World. It is the Parent of the most perfect *Peace* and *Quietness*, *Content* and *Satisfaction* of Mind, of a *long* and

and *healthy* Life here, and of a comfortable Expectation of a glorious Immortality in the Regions of Bleſſedneſs. And were this all that could be ſaid of it, I queſtion not but to any conſidering Man, it would appear to be a *Jewel of ineſtimable Price*; that nothing the whole World can afford is comparable to it; and that he is the wiſeſt Man, who, with the Merchant in the Parable, immediately parts with *all* that ſtands in Competition with *Religion*, and would hinder him in the Performance of the Duties of it.

But this is far from *all*; Godlineſs has not only a Promiſe of the Life that *now is*, but alſo, and chiefly of that which is to *come*: And, if it appears to be ſo ineſtimable a Treaſure when we look no further than this Life, what ſhall we think of it when we contemplate that exceeding Weight of Glory which ſhall be its Reward in Heaven!

The Happineſs that will crown Religion in the other World, ſpringing from the ſame Fountain from whence do flow the Felicities of *God himſelf*; (*i. e.*) it conſiſting in an intimate View and full Enjoyment of the Beauties and Perfections of the Divine Nature (for ſo St. *John*, 1 *Joh.* 3. 2. *We ſhall ſee God as he is*,) it muſt needs be *inexpreſſible*: Nay, the very *Contemplation* of it is too bright for Minds darkned with Fleſh, the Splendors of it flaſh too ſtrongly upon our feeble Senſe now we are in the Body, and too long and

closely gaz'd on will rather *dazle* than *enlighten* our Understandings. No *Mortal* Man can *see God's Face and live*; and therefore most true is that of the Apostle, *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither can it enter into the Heart of Man to conceive the things that God hath reserv'd for those that love him*, 1 Cor. 2. 9. Indeed, this includes all that can possibly be imagin'd of Excellence, and much more than we poor ignorant *benighted* Creatures can imagin.

For God is the Fountain of Being, and consequently of Perfection: All that is charming and truly desirable in Nature, to our Senses, or to our Understandings, in the visible or invisible Creation; is but a Stream from this Divine Fountain, and is in *him* in infinitely greater Excellency. For, he is Beauty, and Goodness, and Harmony *it self*. And therefore since Religion will bring us to such a Happiness as the Vision and Enjoyment of this *chief Good*; what can compare with it for *Value*? *The Depth says, 'tis not in me, and the Sea says, 'tis not with me*; *Man knoweth not the Price thereof, neither is it found in the Land of the Living. It cannot be valued with the Gold of Ophir, with the precious Onyx or the Saphire*; *no mention shall be made of Coral or Pearls, for the Price of Wisdom is above Rubies*, Job 28. 13, &c.

Such then being the Excellency of *Religion*, that it is above all things conducive to the Happiness of Man in *this* World, and will

will bring him to the Enjoyment of *God himself* to eternal Ages, when this short Life is ended; and the whole that the *World* can afford, amounting to no more, by the Confession of one that enjoy'd it all to the Full, than *Emptiness* and *Disappointment*, *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit* here; and if the Word of God be true, an eternal *Banishment* from the *Supreme Good* shall at last be their Punishment, who love this worthless World, more than Religion and their Maker: These things being duly weighed and considered, let any Man in his Wits say, which is of greatest Value, *Religion* or the *World?* And which is the wisest Man, he that ruins his Soul for the Gain of even the whole World, or he that counts all these sublunary things as *Dung* in Comparison with *Religion*, and is ready to part with *all* that this Earth can afford him for the Joys of a good Conscience here, and the Glories of Heaven hereafter? He that prefers the *World* in his Choice, deprives himself of the greatest Comfort of this *present* Life, and parts with the certain Reversion of eternal Happiness in *Heaven*, for Pleasures that don't deserve that Name, they are so *empty* and *unsatisfying*; he brings most exquisite and everlasting Misery upon his *whole* self Soul and Body, for a very short-liv'd imperfect Gratification of his *brutal* Part only, and purchases the Torments of the other World by making himself *unhappy in this*.

In a Word therefore, as much as to be like *God* in *Holiness* and *Happiness* is to be prefer'd before being like the *Devil* in *Sin* and *Misery*; as much as *Satisfaction* is better than *Disappointment*, *Peace*, and *Quietness*, and *Content*, than *Vexation* and continual *Disturbance* and *Perplexity* of Mind, a *confirm'd* Health and long Life, than the *Diseases* and *hasty* Death that follows Debauchery, and the comfortable Expectation of being for ever happy with Saints and Angels, and the blessed God in the Cœlestial Paradise, than the confounding Dread of the Judgment of the Great Day: As much as Immortality is more to be prized than a Life of a Span long, and the Enjoyment of the *chief Good*, than the Pleasures of a *Swine*; of so much greater Value is Religion than all that this World can afford, and indeed the only desirable *Treasure*, and a *Pearl* of *inestimable Price*.

And now, if what has been hitherto discours'd be true, the Application is easie. If Religion be of all things the most precious, let us make it more and more our Endeavour to *inrich* our Souls with this *Treasure*, to *adorn* our rational Nature with this *Pearl of great Price*; and with the Merchant in the Parable, think nothing too much to part with, that we may purchase that Heavenly Wisdom which will make us wise to Salvation. For, *found Wisdom*, as the wise King expresses it, *is a Tree of Life to those that lay hold upon her, and happy*

happy is every one that retaineth her, Prov. 3. 18. *She ſhall give to thine Head an Ornament of Grace, and a Crown of Glory ſhall ſhe deliver to thee,* Prov. 4. 9.

But, he that would have this Wiſdom, and find this Pearl, muſt not only *wiſh* and *deſire*, but, with the Merchant in the Parable, diligently *ſeek* it; *ſeek and ye ſhall find*, ſays our Lord; and *Solomon* aſſures us, *That if we ſeek Wiſdom as Silver, and ſearch for her as for hid Treaſure, then ſhall we underſtand the Fear of the Lord, and find the Knowledge of God,* Prov. 2. 4, 5.

Religion is not acquired without *Diligence*; for though it be the Gift of God, yet the Soul muſt be prepared to receive it; all evil Habits muſt be broke and rooted up, and pious Diſpoſitions planted in their room, and the Temper of the Mind changed by Repentance, and all the Powers of the whole Man become pliable to the Motions of the Spirit of Holineſs before the Divine Likeneſs can be formed in the Soul. And though 'tis the Grace of God that enables us to go thus far (for without it we can do *nothing*) yet our own Concurrence and *Co-operation* with his Grace is neceſſary to bring the bleſſed Work of Regeneration to *Perfection*. An obſtinate *Reſiſtance* of preventing Grace will grieve and *quench* that Life-giving Spirit; and ſuch a Soul ſhall know no more of Religion, than that it was invited to it, but rejected the Offer, and *might* have

been happy in the Enjoyment of so great a Treasure, but it *would* not. But, when a Soul with *Joy* embraces the Motions of the Holy Spirit to a new Life, and makes it her great Endeavour to remove all Obstacles out of the Way, that they may make a due *Impression*, and hungers and thirsts after *new* Degrees of Righteousness; This Soul shall be *fill'd* with the Treasures of the Divine Grace, and the Power of Godliness will be visible in all manner of holy Conversation. But this can't be perform'd without a *watchful persevering Diligence*; there is so much Opposition from within and without to this great Business, that like *Nehemiah*'s Labourers, we must work with our *Swords in our Hands*, Neh. 5. 17. and fight and strive, that we may carry on the Building of a living Temple for our God, and make our Souls Houses of Prayer, adorn'd with Religious Affections, and fit to receive him that hates Iniquity. He that is thus diligent shall grow *rich towards God*, and daily increase in the Knowledge and Love of him, 'till Mortality shall be swallow'd up of Life; and then all the *Labours* of Religion shall for ever be at an End, and nothing remain for the happy Soul to do but to enjoy to all Eternity the glorious *Rewards* of it.

Let us all therefore be *stedfast, unmoveable, and always abound in this Work of the Lord, for as much as we know our Labour shall not be in vain*; and to our diligent Pursuit of this in-

ineſtimable Treaſure of Religion, let us add frequent and earneſt Prayer to God, who is the only Giver of every good and perfect Gift, that he would ſend down Wiſdom from his Holy Heaven, that being preſent, ſhe may labour with us, that we may know what is pleaſing in his Sight, and ſet our ſelves to do it with all Alacrity, running with Diligence and Patience the *Race that is ſet before us, looking unto Jeſus the Author and Finiſher of our Faith; who for the Joy that was ſet before him, endur'd the Croſs, deſpiſing the Shame, and is ſet down at the Right Hand of the Throne of God*, Heb. 12. 1, 2. Remembring that *we* alſo ſhall *reap in due Seaſon, if we faint not*: And if we part with all vile *Affections* for the Sake of Religion in this World, and are ready in Preparation of Mind to ſuffer any worldly Loſs, even to that of Life it ſelf for the Sake of Jeſus and his Truth; we ſhall find ſuch a Recompence of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven, as will abundantly compenſate all our Sufferings here; *for our light Affliction which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.*

Happy is the Exchange of *all* that this world can afford for a Jewel of ſo great Price as *Religion*, and for ſuch inexhauſtible Treaſures of Bliſs as are reſerv'd to *Reward* it in the preſence of God. What is our greateſt Intereſt therefore let us before all things purſue, and where our *Treaſure is, there let our Hearts be alſo.*

The PRAYER.

I.

O Merciful Jesu! Who hast prepared for us a Treasure in Heaven, and taught us the Way to attain it, and warn'd us of the Emptiness of this World's Good, that we may not be allur'd by its Temptations to leave the Way to Life; enable me I intreat thee so stedfastly to attend thy Divine Instructions, that I may more and more daily take off my Love from that which does not, cannot satisfy, and is indeed but Vanity and Vexation of Spirit, and fix it upon that which is above all things valuable: That so, I may be convinc'd by a happy Experience, that true Pleasure, and Freedom, and Happiness, is only to be met with in thy Service; and that I am so little design'd for the Delights of the World and of Sense, that the longer I live to prove them, the less capable I shall be of their Enjoyment. O may that Peace and Tranquility within my own Breast, that Quiet with others, that Health and Length of Days which is in the Left Hand of Religion, and the durable Riches and true Honour that is in her Right, and that chearing Expectation of Heaven when this frail Tabernacle shall be dissolv'd; may this which is the natural Off-spring of true Piety leave so lovely an Idea of it upon my Soul, that I may value it as indeed the greatest Treasure, and a Pearl of inestimable Price! And may I be so wise, as where my Treasure is, there to fix my De-

Deſires, and thither to direct my Endeavours, and part with every thing that is my Hindrance in the Acquiſition of it! And ſince this Pearl is not caſt before Swine, and this Treaſure muſt be diligently ſought for e're it be found: Do thou ſo purify and refine my Affections, that I may above all things, hunger and thirſt after Righteouſneſs, and ſearch for this ſaving Wiſdom as for hid Treaſure; and may thy bleſſed Spirit, which leadeth into all Truth, ſo guide and direct me in my Search, that ſeeking I may find, and having found, never more part with that ineſtimable Jewel, though for the Gain of the whole World, but rather ſell all, even Life it ſelf to ſecure my Poſſeſſion of it. And this Wiſdom I earneſtly beg of thee O Lord, who art the Giver of every good and perfect Gift, through the Merits of Jeſus thy beloved Son, our only Saviour. Amen.

PARABLE

PARABLE IV.

Of a Merciful King, *and his* Unmerciful Servant.

Matth. xviij. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35.

The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a certain King, which would take Account of his Servants.

And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him Ten Thousand Talents.

But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his Lord commanded him to be sold, and his Wife and Children, and all that he had, and Payment to be made.

The Servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord have Patience with me and I will pay thee all.

Then the Lord of that Servant was moved with Compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the Debt.

But the same Servant went out, and found one of his Fellow Servants which ought him an Hundred

dred Pence: And he laid hands on him and took him by the Throat, ſaying, pay me that thou oweſt.

And his Fellow Servant fell down at his Feet, ſaying, have Patience with me and I will pay thee all.

And he would not; but went and caſt him into Priſon, till he ſhould pay the Debt.

So when his Fellow Servants ſaw what was done, they were very ſorry, and came and told unto their Lord all that was done.

Then his Lord, after that he had called him, ſaid unto him, O thou wicked Servant, I forgave thee all that Debt becauſe thou deſiredſt me:

Shouldſt not thou alſo have Compaſſion of thy Fellow-Servant, even as I had Pity on thee?

And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the Tormentors, till he ſhould pay all that was due unto him.

So likewiſe ſhall my Heavenly Father do alſo unto you, if ye from your Hearts forgive not every one his Brother their Treſpaſſes.

THis Parable was ſpoken upon St. *Peter*'s asking our Lord, *how often ſhall my Brother Sin againſt me and I forgive him? Till Seven Times?* ver. 21. To which Queſtion the compaſſionate Jeſus firſt anſwers *directly*, *I ſay not unto thee till Seven Times, but till Seventy Times Seven*: ver. 22. And then *illuſtrates* that his Anſwer, and ſhews how great an

an *Obligation* we have to *forgive Injuries*, and how sad will be our *Punishment* if we do not, in the Parable above written. In which Parable, there are two things in general to be considered.

First, The merciful *Example* of Gods dealing with us miserable Sinners, who lay under a vast Debt to his Justice; express'd by a King's taking account of his Servants, *&c.* and forgiving, *&c.*

Secondly, His great *Displeasure* against those that will not *imitate* that his compassionate Example, in *forgiving* such as have been *injurious* to *them*, express'd by the Kings being wroth with his unmerciful Servant, who, though he receiv'd so much Kindness himself, would shew none to his Fellow Servant who owed him a Trifle in Comparison; but, without the least Compassion, threw him into Prison till he should pay it; upon which his Lord *delivered him over to the Tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.*

Under the *first* General, there are three Particulars to be considered.

First, the Greatness of the Debt which by Sin we have contracted to the Divine Justice, expressed by *Ten Thousand Talents.*

Secondly, the Impossibility of *our* ever *clearing* this Debt, and the sad Consequence of it still should have remain'd upon Account, express'd here by the King's Debtor *having nothing to pay*, and the King's commanding that therefore

he

he ſhould be ſold, and his Wife, and Children, and all that he had, that ſo Payment might be made.

Thirdly, The wondrous *Compaſſion* of our good God, in *pitying* our miſerable Condition; and *forgiving* us all our Debt; expreſſed by that King's being mov'd with Compaſſion at the deplorable Condition of his inſolvent Servant, and *looſing him and forgiving him the Debt.*

Under the *ſecond* General there are likewiſe three *Particulars* to be conſider'd.

Firſt, What it is to forgive one another as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven us, and the great Obligation we have to imitate this Example of our merciful God.

Secondly, Our great *Baſeneſs* if we do not; and,

Thirdly, The miſerable *Conſequence* that will attend that Baſeneſs, we ſhall provoke God to *recall* his Pardon to *us*, and *be deliver'd over to the Tormentors till we ſhall pay all that is due unto him.*

The firſt *General* to be conſider'd in this Parable, is God's *Example* in dealing with us miſerable Sinners, who lay under a *vaſt Debt* to his *Juſtice*; expreſs'd by a *King's taking Account of his Servants*, and freely *forgiving one that was deeply indebted to him.* And the firſt *Particular* to be conſider'd under it, *is*, the *Greatneſs* of the *Debt*, which by *Sin* we have contracted to the Divine *Juſtice.*

By

By contracting a Debt to the Divine Justice is meant the having *violated* the just and holy *Laws* of *God*, and thereby becoming *obnoxious* to his *just Anger*, unless we satisfie his Justice some other Way. As a *convict* Criminal, we say, has not *satisfied*, or is *indebted* to the *Law*, till he has suffer'd the *Punishment* for his Crime which the Law thinks fit to *inflict*; or else finds Favour and has it *remitted* him.

As for the *Greatness* of the Debt which Mankind by his Sin has thus contracted to the Divine Justice, 'tis express'd in this Parable by *ten thousand Talents*; which, according to our Way of Reckoning, is above a *Million of Pounds*. A vast Sum this, but yet far short of what we owe to the Justice of God by Reason of our Iniquities; which are, not only *Millions*, but *innumerable*, even *as the Stars in Heaven*, and *the Sand upon the Sea-shore*: Nor are they only *numberless*, but very *great*; not only many *Thousands*, but many thousands of *Talents*. Every *Sin*, as 'tis a wilful Violation of the Laws of God, has Weight enough (*if God should be extreme to mark what is done amiss*,) to sink a Soul into eternal Ruin: And the Reason is because *God*'s is the *highest Authority*, and his *Laws* most *just* and *equal*, and we have an *infinite* Obligation to *obey* him, both as his *Creatures* and *Dependents*, who *live* by his *Favour* and Bounty, and have received numberless and inestimable Blessings from

from him; and likewise as *rational* Creatures, that we may *perfect* our *own Nature*, by the Practice of those Virtues which will *conform* us to the *Image* and Likeness of *God* himself. And therefore, *Sin* being an *Opposition* to the *highest Authority*, a Violation of the *best* Laws, a Breaking through the *strictest* Bonds, those of *Submission* to the Author of our *Being*, and of *Gratitude* to the Giver of *all the Blessings* we enjoy; and likewise of *Self Love* and *Preservation*, in rejecting the Means of advancing our own Nature to the *Similitude* and *Enjoyment* of *God*, which is our *chief Happiness*: *Sin* being *all this*, must needs be *exceeding sinful*, and indeed the *greatest Evil*, and in no case *eligible*. And therefore, the oftner 'tis *repeated*, and the more of *Choice* there is in the Commission of it, and the more *heinous* the Instances of it are, and the greater *Obligations* Men are under by Reason of God's *Bounty* and *Goodness* to them (whether as to natural or spiritual Endowments) to *serve* and *obey* him; the *higher*, proportionably rises the *Guilt* of *Sin*. And he that *often* and *wilfully* commits *great* Impieties, notwithstanding *infinite Obligations* to the contrary (which *was* and *is* the Case of every *Sinner*) is indebted to God's Justice, not only *Ten Thousand Talents*; but Ten Thousand *Millions* of Talents; *i. e.* his Debt is *infinite*, and unless some Miracle of *Mercy* intervene, the divine Justice cannot be satisfied but by his undergoing an *infinite*

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Punishment. And all the World must acknowledge it *just*, that *Sin* being the *greatest possible Evil*, should be repay'd with the greatest *Possible*, that is, *Eternal Punishment*.

So *vast* a Debt then, lying upon all Mankind by reason of their Sins; it is most true in the

Second Place, That 'twas utterly impossible for them of *themselves* ever to *clear* this debt, and make Satisfaction to the Divine Justice; and the sad Consequence, should it have still remain'd upon *Account*, would have been no less than *eternal Misery*. Which is represented very *lively* in the Parable, by the King's Debtor having *nothing to pay*, and the King thereupon commanding *that he should be sold, and his Wife, and Children, and all that he had, and Payment made*, 2. Kings 4. 1. According to the Custom of the *Jews* in so using Debtors that were not able to pay.

'Tis utterly impossible for Mankind of *themselves* ever to have paid this vast Debt, because *every* individual meer Man is deeply engag'd and always will be so in the same Account; so *deeply*, that he can never clear *himself*, much less make Satisfaction for *others*: Nor is there any thing valuable enough in all the Treasures of Nature to buy off this Sentence, *just*, though *sad*, *The Soul that sinneth shall Dye*. *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord*, says the Prophet *Micah*, when he had a Controversie with the People for their Sins,

and

and wherewith shall I bow my self before the high God? Shall I come before him with Burnt Offerings, with Calves of a Year old; will the Lord be pleased with Thousands of Rams or Ten Thousands of Rivers of Oil? Shall I give my First-born for my Transgression, the Fruit of my Body for the Sin of my Soul? Micah 6. 6. As if he had said, what's all this to him that is the Creator of every thing, the Lord and great Proprietor of all already; and whose Glory and Happiness is infinitely above even *our* most exalted Thoughts and Conceptions? He that is an Ideot that does not confess that all the Riches of the Universe are utterly insufficient, as the Psalmist expresses it, to *redeem the forfeited Souls of Mankind, so that that must be let alone for ever*: All therefore that is in Man to give being, far from sufficient to commute for the Punishment his Sins have deserved; God's Justice must be satisfied by his *undergoing* that Punishment; that is, eternal Death; for ever *dying* yet never *dead*, *extremely* miserable and *for ever* so. A Punishment so inexpressibly great, that *Annihilation* is much to be prefer'd before it; for who can dwell with *everlasting Burnings*! Who can bear an *eternal Banishment* from the *supreme Good*, and Confinement to the dire Abodes of the Devil and his Angels, those merciless Executioners of the Divine Justice, who will exact the Pains we are to suffer with the utmost Cruelty! Who can bear the *Gnawings* of that

never dying Worm, Remorse of Conscience, for *forfeiting* such infinite *Happiness*, and plunging our selves headlong in such a *bottomless Misery*, and that for the Sake of what was always *empty* and *unsatisfying*, even when we did *enjoy it!* And who can bear the Horrors of *Despair* of ever seeing an *End* of such Torments as these, which yet might have been intirely avoided if we would! *This* is *indeed* an unconceivably *miserable* Condition, and all Men that ever lived must have been involv'd in it, had not the *Wisdom* and the *Goodness* of God found out a means both to satisfie his *Justice*, and at the same Time to be *merciful* to his miserable Creatures: To *forgive* the Debt to those that had nothing to pay, and yet to have full *Satisfaction* made him for it. 'Tis what could never have enter'd into the Heart of *Man* to *conceive*; 'tis the great Mystery of Divine Love, which even the Angels desire to look into, and 'tis that which is and shall be the Subject of Eternal Hallelujah's in Heaven.

Thirdly therefore, let us consider the wondrous *Compassion* of our good God, in pitying our sadly deplorable Condition, and *forgiving* us all that Debt which we could never have *paid*, though we had *suffered* the Pains of Hell, for *those* shall never have an *End*; and this is expres'd in the Parable by the King's being mov'd with Compassion at the miserable Condition of his *insolvent* Servant, *and loosing him and forgiving him the Debt.* The

The King in the Parable was very merciful, who, upon the *humble Entreaty* of his poor Servant, and his Promiſe if he would have Patience with him at length to *pay him all*, was moved to Compaſſion and forgave him: But *God* is infinitely *more* merciful in compaſſionating *our* Condition, and forgiving our great Debt, as will appear from the following Conſiderations.

For firſt, *Our* Debt is infinitely greater. Ten Thouſand Talents, in Compariſon of the *numberleſs* Number of the heinous Sins of Mankind, are but as the Sand of an *Hour-Glaſs*, compar'd with that of the *Sea-Shore*; and *one wilful* Violation of *our* Obedience to God, is a *far weightier* Debt to the Divine *Juſtice*, than Millions of Talents would be from one Mortal to another. And the Reaſon is plain, becauſe the *diſtance* between God and Man is *infinite*; and for a *Beggar* to ſpurn at a *Prince*, is certainly a Crime of much higher Aggravation, than to do the like to one of his own ragged Gang.

All that is culpable (as was ſaid) is met together in a *wilful Sin*; and therefore infinite and amazingly great muſt be the Guilt of all Mankind, who have heap'd up Tranſgreſſions without Number; and have *no way* left of *paying* this great Debt, but by ſuffering without End the *Pains of Hell*. And ſuch a dreadful Puniſhment as this, being annex'd to Sin by him who is infinitely *good* and *juſt*; is Ar-

gument sufficient, that there is no Debt comparable to that which a guilty Sinner owes to the Justice of God. And therefore, when God gives *Mercy*, so *great* an Exaltation as to forgive so *vast* a Debt as this; 'tis Compassion impossible to be parallel'd.

Secondly, God's Compassion in forgiving us is infinitely greater than that good King's in the Parable, because we less deserve God's Favour than that poor Servant did his Lord's. *He acknowledg'd* his Debt, and was *griev'd* for his not being able to discharge it and humbly *submitted* himself to his offended Lord; but 'tis quite otherwise with us, *we* add *Obstinacy* and *Pride* to our long Score, are still in actual Rebellion against God, and daily more and more provoke him by *new* Impieties: *We* make what haste we can, as the Prophet expresses it, to *fill up* the Measure of our *Fathers* Iniquities and our *own*, rather than by *Repentance* and *better* Life, to *lessen* the great Account that is against us.

And this is to enflame God's *Anger* rather than to move his *Compassion*, and does indeed deserve *quick Vengeance* rather than *Forgiveness*. And yet, so boundless an Ocean is the *Divine Goodness*, even in this *rebellious* State God pities his poor unhappy Creatures, *and is full of Compassion, long-suffering, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the Evil*; and when we deserve nothing but the *severest* Punishment, thinketh upon *Mercy* and *forgiveness*; and

and proposes very easie Conditions of Reconciliation and Readmittance to his Favour, and even *courts* us to accept them: *Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will ye dye O House of Israel!*

Now for the great and infinitely *happy God*, to treat such *hardned Rebels* at so tender and compassionate a rate; to be so ready to forgive those who not at all *deserve* it, but rather the utmost Expresses of his *Vengeance*; is doubtless a Mercy *infinite* and beyond Comparison.

Thirdly, The poor Debtor in the Parable *humbly besought* his Lord's Pity and Forbearance, he fell down on his Face and worshipped him, and by that his *humble Behaviour* and *earnest Intreaty*, inclin'd his Lord to commiserate his sad Condition. But instead of this, *we* are not so *little* sensible of, or afflicted with *any* thing, as that great Debt we owe to the Divine Justice. So *far* from passionately *begging* for our Pardon, that we spend but very few *Thoughts* about it, and *most* of us are very *little*, and some not *at all apprehensive* of the Need we have of being again receiv'd into God's Favour, and the sad Consequence if we are *not*: And are far more sollicitous about *promoting* some *petty* Interest in *this* World, than about the *Pardon of our Sins*, which is the One Thing necessary in Order to our Escape from *Hell*.

And this is so great a *slighting* and *undervaluing* God's Forgiveness, expresses so much

indifferency whether he does it or no; that one would think it should be enough to provoke God to *resolve* their *Destruction*, and swear in his Wrath that they shall never enter into his Rest.

And yet, so wondrously compassionate is our good God, *unsought* to, *undesired*, he of his own meer *Tenderness*, intirely forgave the *past* Offences of his thoughtless Creatures, and for the *Future* still promis'd Forgiveness to such as should offend anew, upon this only *easie* Condition, that they should no more *wilfully* break his holy Laws, and immediately *repent* when through *Surprize* or *Inadvertency* or the Force of *Temptation* they should do amiss. And to be thus merciful notwithstanding so much Provocation to the contrary, is Compassion that has no Parallel.

Fourthly, God's Goodness in pitying and forgiving *Sinners*, is infinitely greater than that of the King in the Parable in forgiving his poor Debtor; because the *Misery Mankind* is delivered from by this Mercy of *God*, is infinitely *greater*, than *that* which the poor *wretch* in the *Gospel escap'd* by the Compassion of *his Lord*.

His Punishment, had his Lord dealt *rigorously* with him, would have been, that he should be sold, and his Wife, and Children, and all that he had, that so, in some Measure at least Payment might be made; and the *utmost* that this could amount to was *Poverty* and

and *Slavery*, both of *himſelf* and all his *Family*, all the Days of his Life: Which though indeed a very *ſad* Condition, and ſuch as no Submiſſion could be too great, no Entreaties too earneſt to *avoid*; yet certainly, comes infinitely ſhort of theſe *eternal* Miſeries in the Regions of Darkneſs, and in the Society of the Devil and his Angels, which would have been the Portion of the *whole Race of Mankind*, had not God's merciful Forgiveneſs prevented it, and given us better Hopes.

Now the greater the *Neceſſity*, the greater the *Charity* that *relieves* it; the greater and more *general* the *Danger*, the more valuable the *Reſcue*; the more extream the Miſery, and the greater the Number of thoſe that were condemn'd to ſuffer it, the greater the Compaſſion that relents and delivers from it. It being therefore abſolutely *neceſſary* that God ſhould *pardon* Sinners, that they might eſcape the Puniſhment due to Sin (for they had nothing to pay) and the Danger of thoſe Puniſhments being *imminent*, the Meaſure of Mens Iniquities riſing to ſo *great a Height*; and the Miſery that would have involv'd all Man kind had God's Vengeance had its free Courſe, and Sin its due Reward, being no leſs than that of *Hell*, and that for *ever* too: That Compaſſion of God that inclin'd him to forgive ſo *many* wretched Debtors as the *whole Race of Mankind*, and prevented ſuch otherwiſe *unavoidable*, *endleſs* and *unconceivable Miſery*; was certainly

infinite Compassion, wonderfully great and beyond Comparison.

Fifthly, The *Consequence* of God's forgiving Sinners is infinitely *happier* than that of the Forgiveness of the poor Debtor in the Parable. *He*, after his Lord's loosing and forgiving him, was out of Fear indeed of that sad Misfortune which otherwise must have fal'n upon him; he enjoy'd his Liberty, and that of his Wife and Children, and continu'd still in Possession of what he had, 'till he forfeited all again by his Cruelty to his Fellow-Servant, which was no mean Comfort; but then this was all: We read of no *new* Favours confer'd upon him, or that he was entrusted with any more of his Lord's Revenue, or the like.

But now, the compassionate *God*, has to *Forgiveness* of Sinners, added innumerable and inestimable *Favours*; dignifi'd them with the Title of his *Sons*, communicated to them fresh Assistances of his blessed Spirit to help and guide them in the Way to Happiness; and promised them Crowns of eternal Glory, and everlasting Inheritances in Heaven, and an intimate Vision and Enjoyment of *himself* (who is the Center of Felicity) provided they continue sincerely obedient to him for the Time to come. There is no Happiness which a rational Creature is *capable* of, but God, in his infinite Mercy freely and bountifully confers upon Mankind, now that his Compassions have reconciled them to him; and in the

Words

Words of St. *Paul*, *He gives us richly all things to enjoy*, 1 Tim. 6. 17.

And for God, not only to *forgive* obſtinate Rebels againſt his Divine Government, to paſs by their vile *Ingratitude* to *him* their greateſt Benefactor, and baſe Abuſe of his Bleſſings to his Diſhonour; but to confer upon them *Favours* of the greateſt Value, to receive 'em into his own *Boſom*, and make 'em Coheirs with his eternal Son, and advance 'em to his heavenly Kingdom: This is ſuch an admirable Expreſſion of the Divine Goodneſs and Love of Mankind, as could never proceed from any other but him who is *Goodneſs it ſelf*.

In the laſt Place, that which exalts the Compaſſion of God to the higheſt Degree, and makes it indeed *miraculous*, is the amazing Courſe he took thus to ſhew *Mercy* in the *Pardon* of Sinners, and yet *ſatisfie his Juſtice* too.

The King in the Parable was at Liberty to diſpoſe of his *own* as he pleaſed, and he might have forgiven, without further Regard to any thing of *Juſtice* in that Caſe, a *greater* Debt if it had been owing to him: But in the Caſe of God's forgiving *Sinners* it was otherwiſe. God had before ſolemnly declar'd to our firſt Parents, and very often afterwards, that *the Soul that ſinned it ſhould die*; and his Juſtice was concern'd to ſee that Sentence executed; and in the Nature of the thing likewiſe 'twas perfectly *juſt* that the Violaters of God's holy and good Commands, ungrateful Rebels againſt

againſt their *Creator* and greateſt *Benefactor*, ſhould receive a due Recompence for their Wickedneſs.

Now *Juſtice* is as eſſential to *God* as *Mercy*; and though his infinite *Goodneſs* mov'd him to have *Compaſſion* upon Sinners, yet his *Juſtice* pleaded for their *Puniſhment*; Mercy would *remit* the Debt, but *Juſtice* required *Satisfaction*.. A Difficulty this, which *mortal* Wit could never ſolve. But God, who is infinitely *wiſe* as well as *good* and juſt, that the Work of his Hands might not periſh, nor his Image and Likeneſs be for ever miſerable, and that his *Juſtice* likewiſe might be fully *ſatisfied*; contriv'd a wondrous Way for the Redemption of Sinners, by freely forgiving 'em their vaſt Debt, and yet making full Satisfaction to his *Juſtice* for the Sins of the whole World. And that was, by the Incarnation of his bleſſed Son, and ſubſtituting him in our ſtead, to ſuffer, as the Repreſentative of Mankind, the Puniſhment due to their Iniquities, and by his ſpotleſs Blood to make an univerſal Atonement, and through the Merit of that his *precious Sacrifice* (for what's above the Merit of the Blood of the Son of God?) to purchaſe for them *Pardon* and Forgiveneſs, the Love and Favour of God in this World, and the eternal Enjoyment of him in the next. And by this means, as the Apoſtle expreſſes it, *to declare his Righteouſneſs, that he might be juſt; and the Juſtifier* likewiſe *of him that believeth in Jeſus*, Rom. 3. 26. Thus

Thus *Mercy* and *Truth* are miraculouſly met together, and *Righteouſneſs* and *Peace* have kiſs'd each other. And for ever bleſſed be that infinitely *wiſe* and *juſt Compaſſion*, which in ſo wondrous a Manner contriv'd the *Forgiveneſs of our vaſt Debt*, and the *Satisfaction* of the Divine *Juſtice* too! What Love can be greater than this, that God ſhould ſend his eternal Son into the World to be the Propitiation for Sinners! And that while we were *Enemies*, Chriſt ſhould dye for us, and bear our Sins in his own Body on the Tree, that through his Stripes we might be healed! *Wonderful art thou, O Lord, in thy Doings towards the Children of Men, and thy Mercy is over all thy Works!* And O that our Hearts might be warm'd with the ſame divine Flame, and *we might love much, to whom ſo much hath been forgiven!*

And thus much for the firſt thing to be conſider'd in this Parable; namely, the glorious Example of Forgiveneſs that God has ſet us, in his dealing thus mercifully with us miſerable Sinners who lay under a vaſt Debt to the Divine Juſtice, and had nothing to pay; and how infinitely this Compaſſion of God to Sinners exceeds the greateſt and moſt generous Expreſſion of Forgiveneſs, that can be ſhewn by one Man to another. 'Tis greater than the King's forgiving Ten Thouſand Talents to his poor Servant in the Parable, becauſe he entreated him and had nothing to pay.

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I proceed now, to the *second* General to be consider'd in this Parable, which is, God's great Displeasure against those that will not *imitate* this his compassionate Example, in forgiving such as have been injurious to *them*; but like that wicked Servant to whom the King had been so *gracious*, rigidly requiring full Satisfaction for little *Trifles* and *Punctilios*. As he, no sooner out of the Presence of his compassionate Lord, *but took his Fellow-Servant by the Throat, who ow'd him an Hundred Pence*, and though intreated to have Patience, as earnestly as he had but just before intreated his offended Lord, yet without the least Pity, threw him into Prison till he should pay the Debt. The *Consequence* of such a *revengeful* Temper will be like that of this cruel Servant, who was not only severely *rebuked* for his Wickedness, but had the Pardon his Lord gave him *recalled*, and *was deliver'd over to the Tormentors till he should pay the uttermost Farthing. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do unto you*, says our Lord, *if ye from your Hearts forgive not every one his Brother their Trespasses*. And under this General there are likewise, as was said, Three Particulars to be considered.

First, What it is to forgive one another, *as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us*; and the great *Obligation* we have to imitate this Example of our merciful God. To forgive one another in Imitation of the Divine Example,

ample, is *firſt* to forgive ſuch as have injured us, *freely* and without *Reſerve*; and that tho' they ſtill continue to ſhew themſelves our Enemies, and are ready to do us freſh Miſchiefs when it lies in their Power. For *thus*, as we have ſeen, *God* dealt with us miſerable *Sinners*; *he firſt loved us*, and while we were yet *Sinners*, and conſequently in open Hoſtility and Rebellion againſt him, even then he ſent his Son to dye for us, and be the Propitiation for our Sins: He took pity upon us when we were ſtill adding new Wickedneſſes to our long account, and when we *deſerved* nothing but Eternal *Miſery*, thought upon *Mercy*.

And in Imitation of this our Lord commands us to love our *Enemies*; not to render *Evil* for *Evil*, but contrariwiſe *Bleſſing*; *that ſo we may be the Children of our Father which is in Heaven*. For, to uſe our Saviours Enforcement of this; if thoſe only ſhare in our Affections or Eſteem, who are as beneficial and kind to us as we to them, what Thank have we? Self-Love and Intereſt may there be the Motives, and very little of True Piety and Goodneſs; nay, even the very worſt of Men may be as eminent for ſuch Sort of Charity as the beſt, Publicans and Sinners, as our Lord obſerved, doing the ſame. But *Chriſtians* ſhould be of a more *Godlike* Temper, their Charity more free and diſintereſſed; the greater and more frequent *their* Injuries, the more ready ſhould they be to pardon and *forgive*;

and

and not only be reconciled after a *seven-fold* Wrong, but after one repeated *seventy-times seven.* And our Saviour has likewise further inforced this by his *own* Example, who with his last Breath pray'd for the Forgiveness of his *cruel Murtherers.*

Secondly, We must not only forgive such as but little *deserve* it, but likewise in Correspondence to our *Divine Pattern*, whether they *desire* it or no: For thus it was in God's Forgiveness of Sinners, he *prevented* us by the Riches of his compassionate Goodness, and entreated his Rebellious Creatures, first by his Prophets, then by his only Son, to be reconcil'd to him, and embrace their Pardon. And thus, *those that will be Imitators of God as dear Children*, must likewise do. Rather than Enmity should continue we must *seek* to our Enemies to be reconcil'd, though they were the first that *offered* the Offence. And this, however hardly it may sound, is not only our Duty, by Vertue of that *general* Command of forgiving one another *as God has forgiven us*, but is expresly commanded by our compassionate Saviour, *Mat.* 18. 15. (which occasion'd that Question of St. *Peter*, verse 21. *How often shall I forgive my Brother?* Upon which our Lord deliver'd this Parable) his Words are these, and deserve our serious Attention. *Moreover, if thy Brother* trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault *between thee and him alone. If thy Brother trespass against*

gainſt thee, or as we uſually expreſs it, *firſt* did the Injury, or *gave* the Affront, *go thou to him*, ſtay not till *he* comes, and *acknowledges* his Fault to *thee*, for that's a thing Men are very backward in doing, either for *fear* or for *Shame*, or out of *Pride* and *Greatneſs of Spirit*, as it muſt be term'd, or for other Reaſons; and *Time* uſually *widens* ſuch Breaches, and encreaſes *Strangeneſs* and *Averſion*: But go thou therefore to *him* in Meekneſs and the Spirit of *Forgiveneſs*, and with Reſolutions of paſſing by all further Unkindneſſes, and it may be *reproaches* for your good Will, calmly tell him his Fault, expoſtulate the Caſe with him, and in all Likelyhood he *will hear thee*, a right Underſtanding between you will enſue, and thou ſhalt gain thy Brother. This is indeed to be like God in this great Excellence of forgiving Injuries, and is, as a moſt noble Expreſſion of Chriſtian Charity, ſo we ſee very plainly commanded by our Lord, and ſhould be taken into our ſerious Conſideration in order to our agreeable *Practice*.

Thirdly, We muſt not only ſo far forgive as not to *revenge*, but in Imitation of the *Divine* Pattern of Forgiveneſs ſet before us, be ready to do all Acts of *Kindneſs* and *Beneficence* to our Enemy, as *Occaſion* ſhall ſerve, and his *Needs* require: remembring the Words of our great Maſter: *Do good to them that hate you, and pray for thoſe that deſpitefully uſe you and perſecute you, for ſo ſhall ye be the Children of the Higheſt, who*

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is kind to the unthankful and to the evil. And we must endeavour to confirm the new made Agreement, by more than ordinary Expressions of good Will, that we may heap Coals upon our Enemies Head to melt him into a Correspondent Charity; and likewise that there may be no Place left for our Enemy or our selves to *doubt* the *Sincerity* of our Forgiveness. For the *smoothest Words* may be rotten and deceitful, and the not *revenging* an Injury may be for want of *Power* or *Opportunity*; but when to good Words, *beneficial Actions* are added, then may a Man well be thought to love and forgive, not in *Word* only, *but in Deed and in Truth.*

This is *Christian* Forgiveness of Injuries, or, in the Apostle's Words, *the forgiving one another if any have a Quarrel against any, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us*: Ephes. 4. *ult.* i. e. *freely* and *intirely*, though their Malice *still continues* against us; nay, to *go* and *offer* 'em Forgiveness and Reconciliation tho' they neither *desire* nor *deserve* it, and to accompany our Forgiveness with Acts of *Kindness* and *good Turns.*

But what has been said upon this Account must have a *Limitation*; lest if bound indiscriminately upon *all Men* and at *all Times*, that is, in *all* Instances of Wrong, in thwart and run Counter to other Duties of our holy Religion. Now in order to our being inform'd of the just Limits of this great Duty, we must consider

conſider that Injuries may be of three Sorts; affecting either Men's *Perſons*, their *good Names*, or their *Eſtates*: And each of theſe may be either in Danger of *Ruin* by the Injuries of a wicked Man, or only greatly *damag'd*, or the Injury may be but *ſmall* and *trifling*, and ſuch as brings no *conſiderable* and *laſting* Ill Effects along with it. Now ſuch Injuries as threaten *Ruin* to a Man in any of thoſe Reſpects, ought not to be ſilently let paſs, nor the Man *ſo* forgiven as to have no Notice taken of him; and ſuch a legal *Proſecution* of him as is neceſſary to *ſecure* a Man's *Perſon*, or to *vindicate* or recover his blaſted *Reputation*, and to preſerve his *Eſtate*, all or either of which would be *ruin'd* by the injurious Perſon if tamely let alone; a legal *Proſecution* in ſuch Caſes as theſe, is allow'd by the Law of *God* and *Nature*, as well as *that* of the *Land*. And the Caſe is proportionably the ſame as to Injuries that *greatly endamage* a Man in any of thoſe Reſpects before mentioned: And were *all* Wrongs, how great ſoever, to be ſubmitted to and put up in Silence by Chriſtians, by Vertue of the Command of forgiving Injuries; 'twould be to betray the Sheep to the Wolves, to expoſe the Diſciples of Chriſt to the Malice of all the wicked World; which is not conſiſtent with the *Wiſdom* and *Goodneſs* of the great Shepherd of the Sheep, Chriſt Jeſus. And St. *Paul* ſays expreſly, *He that provideth not for his own Houſe, i. e* for the comfortable

Subsistence of his Family, *has deny'd the Faith, and is worse than an Infidel: i. e.* Acts contrary to the Obligations both of *Nature* and Religion. But *he* will soon *ruin*, instead of *supporting* his Family, who suffers ill Men, without Interruption to make what Havock they please of his *Person*, *Reputation* or *Estate*.

But now as for *smaller* Injuries in any of these Respects, such as make no *great* Alteration in our Circumstances, and may be born without any *great* Inconvenience; these are to be pass'd by, and the Injury forgiven according to the Measures before described: And 'tis observable that the Instances our Saviour makes use of in this Matter, are of the lesser Sort of Injuries, such as a Blow on the Cheek, the taking away of a Garment, and the like; and 'twas for being rigorous about a few *Pence*, that the King in the Parable was so wroth with his Servant: And rather than a Christian should embroil himself in Law-Suits, and run the Hazard of losing the Ornament of a meek and quiet Spirit for such small Matters, he should suffer a Repetition of *such* Injuries. And indeed, as Religion is in all Respects the greatest *Prudence*, so particularly in forbidding *Litigious* Quarrels, unless a Man's *whole* Interest, or at least a *great* Part of it be at Stake; for *Law* is now become a *boundless Ocean*, and generally very rough and Stormy, and swells Men's Passions to an exorbitant Height, and shipwrecks their *Charity* as well as their *Estates*.

And

And as to thoſe greater Injuries our Saviour mentions, *Mat.* 5.44. of Men's being our *Enemies* profeſs'd, and *hating*, and curſing, and *deſpitefully* uſing, and *perſecuting* us: Neither he nor his Apoſtles, there or any where elſe forbid Chriſtians endeavouring in a legal manner to ſecure and defend themſelves, and recover their own, but only not to return Evil for Evil, and to be ſo far from Purpoſes of *Revenge* or *retaliating*, ſuch Injuries, as rather to *love* and *bleſs* and *pray for*, and do *good to*, upon Occaſion, thoſe that deal ſo maliciouſly by them; and to manage the Suit or Contention with them with *Charity*, having no *Rancour* or *Malice* in their Hearts againſt the *Perſon* of their Adverſary. That is, in ſhort, our Holy Religion does oblige us in *leſſer* Injuries intirely, both to paſs by the Offence, and forgive the *Offender* according to the Meaſures before deſcribed; but in *greater* Injuries of any Sort, where Ruin or inſupportable Damage will follow, though it permits, nay, obliges to endeavour a legal Reparation, and ſo *not* to forgive the *Offence*, yet Chriſtians muſt as intirely, and according to the ſame Meaſures forgive the *Offender*, as in the ſmalleſt Inſtances of Wrong. And by this Means they will become the Children of their Heavenly Father, who though in infinite Mercy he forgave the World of *Sinners*, and moreover beſtowed on them richly all things to enjoy; yet in the Perſon of his bleſſed Son their Repreſentative, he ſeverely expreſs'd

his Displeasure against their *Sins*, that they might be deter'd from persisting in themafresh, to the *Ruin* of their immortal Souls.

Besides those Injuries that terminate upon a Man's *self* and his own Concerns, there are others done to our *Neighbour* and the *Publick*, which must not be pass'd by without animadverting upon them according to their Deserts. As for Instance, if a bloody Villain Murders a Man's Friend or Neighbour or Relation,and he knows who is the Murderer, it may be he *only*; in this Case, whatever Inclination he may have to conceal it, whether out of Natural Compassion, or Unwillingness to be the Occasion of the Man's Execution,since nothing can recall the murder'd Person to Life,and the Murderer may live to repent, or the like: Because he is a Member of Society, and obliged, as much as in him lies, to promote its Safety and Happiness,which by such Villains is much *disturb'd* and *lessen'd*, and would be *ruin'd* should such Men pass *unpunish'd*; 'tis his Duty to endeavour by all lawful Means to bring so heinous an Offender to condign Punishment, that so *corrupt* a Member being cut off from the Community, the Health of the whole may be better secur'd. And so in all Cases of the like Nature. Always remembring that if any thing of *private Revenge* be intermix'd, it pollutes the Action, and makes the Man doubly guilty of *Malice* and *Hypocrisy*.

What

What has been hitherto ſaid concerning the *Limits* of *forgiving Injuries*, concerns Men only as *private Perſons*: As for *Magiſtrates* and *Governours*, they being conſtituted by God to be *a Terror to evil doers*, to be *Revengers to execute Wrath upon them*, and to *praiſe* and *encourage* thoſe only that do *well*: Rom. 13. 3, 4. The Meaſure of their Forgiveneſs of publick Injuries, is the publick Good; ſo far as is conſiſtent with their Obligations as Magiſtrates, as is conducive to the common *Weal*, according to the Judgment of *Prudence* and *unprejudic'd Reaſon*, they *may*, and do *well* to incline to Lenity and Compaſſion; but a *fooliſh* and a *mercenary* Pity is a betraying their Truſt, a *bearing the Sword in vain*; and *ſuch* Magiſtrates, inſtead of being *Fathers* of their Country, are indeed the Perfidious *Deſtroyers* of it. And thus much for the Nature of Chriſtian *Forgiveneſs of Injuries*, in Imitation of the Divine Pattern God has ſet us, with its general Limits.

As for the great *Obligation* we have to *Copy* after this admirable Pattern of our Merciful Heavenly Father; it is two-fold, 1. With Reſpect to *God*. 2. To our *Selves*.

Firſt, With Reſpect to *God*, our Obligation to forgive *one another* as he has forgiven us is very great, becauſe 'tis what he has declared will be highly *pleaſing* to him, as a Reſemblance of that Perfection of his Nature which he ſeems moſt of all to take *Delight* in. For

so, *Exod.* 33. 19. when *Moses* desired to see his *Glory*, he told him he would make all his *Goodness* pass before him; and Chap. 34. 6. The Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in Goodness and Truth, keeping Mercy for Thousands, forgiving Iniquity, Transgression and Sin.* And accordingly, St. *John* gives the Definition of him, *God is Love.*

Now certainly, those that have receiv'd such infinite Favours from this good God, and have been forgiven so *vast* a Debt, as we Sinners have; have the greatest Reason in the World to endeavour to the utmost of their Power, to please this their greatest Benefactor in every thing. And nothing being more pleasing to him than to see the Image and Reflection of his Divine *Love* and *Philanthropy* upon the Souls of his Creatures, to see 'em love and compassionate one another according to his glorious Example; we are infinitely obliged to imitate his Pity and Forgiveness towards *us*, in passing by the Offences of our *Fellow-Servants.* Further, those to whom God has forgiven so vast a Debt as that which miserable Sinners ow'd to the Divine Justice, are questionless bound, and that with the strictest Ties to love him infinitely again; but now St. *John* says plainly, that *he that loves God must love his Brother also, and if a Man say, I love God, and yet hateth his Brother, he is a Lyar, and the Truth*

Truth is not in him: 1 John 4. 20, 21. For as he ſays, *Chap.* 3. 17. *He that ſhutteth up his Bowels of Compaſſion from his Brother, how dwelleth the Love of God in him?* And therefore as much as we are bound to love our *good God*, who has forgiven us our *numberleſs Iniquities*, ſo much are we bound to *manifeſt* that our Love to him, by being pitiful and gentle to our *brethren* that have injur'd *us*, and ready to *forgive* them: For *ſo* ſays our Lord, ſhall ye be my *Diſciples*, and *ſo* ſhall ye be the *Children* of your *Father which is in Heaven.* And doubtleſs that wicked Servant in the Parable, had not ſo due an Apprehenſion of his Lord's great Compaſſion to *him*, nor ſo *grateful* a Senſe of it as he ought to have had, who could immediately forget the miſerable Condition he was ſo lately in *himſelf*, and how much he dreaded leſt his Lord ſhould rigidly exact his great Debt of him, and how importunately he begg'd that he would have Patience with him; and yet uſe ſo much Cruelty to his Fellow-Servant for a Debt very inconſiderable. He could not but know that ſuch *Barbarity* would be very contrary to the compaſſionate Temper of his Lord; and therefore was bound in *gratitude*, if upon no other Account, to imitate his Lord's Example, and not immediately act what would be ſo diſpleaſing to him. And ſo it is in our Caſe; God is *Love*, and has wondrouſly *manifeſted* his *Love* in forgiving us miſerable Sinners; and therefore

we are bound in *gratitude*, and because 'twill be *pleasing* to him, were that all, to imitate that his Charity, and mutually to love and forgive one another. But when besides, we have our Saviours express *Command* for it, *Mat.* 5. 44. and *Luke* 6. 37. and that, *not until seven times only, but until seventy times seven*, as in the Verse before this Parable: As much as Men are obliged to obey the Commands of God their Saviour, so strong is their Obligation to forgive Injuries with respect to God.

Secondly, Our Obligation is very great to imitate God's compassionate Example with respect to our *selves*. For 'tis the best Way to *secure Quiet*, and *Peace* and *Happiness*; and as much as every Man is bound to provide for his own Quiet, and the *Peace* and *Happiness* of *Society*, and of his own Soul too in the other World; so much is every Man bound not to be malicious and revengeful, but of a Temper ready to *forgive*.

For however *sweet* Revenge may seem to be to malicious Spirits in the *Execution*, it must needs make the Mind very *uneasie before* 'tis executed, and bring great Calamities along with it *afterward*, and is the most base *devilish* Temper in the World, and makes a Man a *Fiend incarnate*. Whereas as an Aptness to *forgive*, is a *Godlike* Disposition, for God is *Love*, the *Spring* of Kindness and Compassion, of Mercy and Forgiveness; and as *his*

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Happineſs is the Reſult of the Excellencies and Perfections of his *Nature*; ſo thoſe who reſemble him in the moſt *glorious* of thoſe Perfections, muſt needs likewiſe enjoy a great Share of Tranquillity and inward Bliſs. But if *God* be the great Exemplar of *Forgiveneſs*, how groundleſs is the uſual Objection againſt this excellent Vertue of Chriſtianity, that it betrays a *mean ſervile* Spirit, and is a thing much *below* a *Gentleman!* Can any Man of common Senſe think it a Diſgrace to be like *God*, and that in his moſt *glorious* Perfection too? If God be the Fountain of Honour, we muſt allow it to be rather, the moſt *noble generous* Action in the World.

It is the beſt Way likewiſe of *ending* Strifes, and *overcoming* our Adverſaries by rendring *Good* for *Evil*. It eaſes the Mind of thoſe great *Diſquietudes* that conſtantly attend Deſires of Revenge; it prevents all the Miſchiefs that *follow* it, ſuch as *freſh* Injuries from the Party we revenge our ſelves upon, if we leave him his Life, and the Stroke of Juſtice if we perſue him to the Death. But beſides theſe evil Conſequences of Revenge, and many others which *Forgiveneſs prevents*, there is more true *Pleaſure* and *Sweetneſs* in the *Act* of Forgiveneſs and *Reconciliation*, as was hinted above, than in that of *Revenge*.

For however the Devil may hurry Men on in an eager Purſuit of Revenge, and flatter 'em with the Hopes of great *Satisfaction* when

when 'tis *perfected*; yet there is a secret *Horrour* and *Aversion* to it from *within*, which, as 'twere pulls *back* the Hand when going to strike; or what other way soever it be expressed, endeavours to *hinder* it, and makes the Heart recoil and repent of the Undertaking, and *execute* it with *trembling* and misgivings of Soul; and immediately *after* come dire Forebodings of the Vengeance of him to whom Vengeance belongeth, and a Kind of Hell upon Earth. But *Forgiveness* is attended with *Applauses* of Conscience, and the *Approbation* of *Reason*, and *Chearfulness* of Spirit: There is an inward Pleasure and *Satisfaction* of Mind quite throughout the Action, and when 'tis *compleated*, no Man can express the silent *Joy* that runs through the whole Soul, and it seems a Foretaste of the Joys of the Blessed in *Heaven*.

Even that Part of Forgiveness which seems most of all impracticable, and contrary to Flesh and Blood, that of *suing* to a Man to be reconciled that has *done* the Injury, and still *continues* to be one's Enemy; *this* does of all yield the *greatest* Pleasure to the Soul: And that, not only because 'tis the *nearest* Resemblance to the Mercy of *God*, who sent his Son to mediate between him and us, and by his Death to reconcile us to himself, when 'twas *we* miserable Wretches that had *offended*, and were then in *actual* Rebellion against him; but from the Nature of the thing *it self*.

ſelf. For 'tis a kind of *ſurprizing* a Man into Charity before he is *aware.* When Men *do* Injuries, they generally ſtand upon their *Defence,* and expect to *receive* Injuries again; but when a Man finds, inſtead of this, Acts of Friendſhip and Good-will, and Readineſs to forgive, and Peace and Quietneſs *offer'd* ſo *freely,* and upon ſuch eaſie Terms, without the *Shame* and natural Regret in *ſeeking* it, and *asking* Pardon, and making *Satisfaction,* and the like: How pleas'd muſt the Man needs be, to find a *Friend,* when he fear'd and expected an Enemy? Few Men love Strife for *Strife's ſake,* and many a Man injures another in ſuddain *Heat* and Paſſion, and in cooler Blood *repents* of it, though he can't prevail with himſelf to *ask Forgiveneſs*: And ſometimes a Man injures another in retaliating ſomething that he took amiſs from *him,* tho' perhaps far otherwiſe *intended*; and it may be *falſe Reports* may have made the Difference. But now, *this* Way of Reconciliation preſently ſets all right again; it creates a right Underſtanding between Party and Party, it nips Quarrels in the very *Bud,* and leaves no room for further Malice and Ill Will. And what a holy *Triumph* will there then be in the forgiving Soul, thus to have ſoftned his Enemy, and overcome *Evil* with Good!

And ſuch *happy Effects* of Forgiveneſs of Injuries as theſe, methinks ſhould engage every conſidering Man to put it in *Practice,* were this

this *all*; but when besides all this so great a Mercy as the perfect Recovery of the Favour of *God*, the Forgiveness of our *own vast* Debt, and the Enjoyment of the Glories and Felicities of *Heaven* shall be the *Reward* of it; Surely no Man in his Wits, but must think himself as much obliged to *forgive Injuries*, as to make himself eternally happy if he can. And that this exceeding great *Reward* shall attend the hearty Practice of this *Vertue*, is plain from our Lord's own Words, *Luke* 6. 37. *Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*

And, as it appears from what has been said, that we have upon all Accounts great *Obligation* to imitate the compassionate Example of our merciful God; so in the

Second Place, Our *Baseness* will be very great if we do *not:* And that both with Respect to God and Man. With respect to *God*, not to forgive a *petty* Injury from our Brother, when God has forgiven such *infinite* Provocations as ours against *himself*, is the vilest *Baseness*, because, as was said before, 'tis the vilest *Ingratitude*, and *Forgetfulness* of his great Mercy to us. I say a *petty* Injury from our Brother; for *every* Injury, how great soever, that one Mortal can do to another, is indeed, but of *no regard*, in compare with those mountainous Heaps of Wickedness which we have been guilty of against God; and bear not so great Proportion to them, as an *Hundred Pence* does to *Ten Thousand Talents*; as the

the Parable expreſſes both Debts, that which the compaſſionate *King* forgave his *Servant*, and that which that *wicked Man* would not forgive his *Fellow-Servant*. The infinite Goodneſs of God to *us*, if it has made its due Impreſſion upon our Spirits, will leave ſo charming an Idea of Forgiveneſs upon our Souls, as will incline us to a ſuitable Practice upon all Occaſions, eſpecially ſince we know from God's great Compaſſion towards us, how *pleaſing* to him Compaſſion is in others. But, notwithſtanding God's unſpeakable Kindneſs to *us*, to cheriſh a Temper of Mind which we can't but be ſenſible he *infinitely hates*, and endeavour to make thoſe miſerable as far as our Malice will reach, to whom *God* has forgiven as much as he forgave *us*, and for whoſe Redemption Chriſt dyed, and for whom are reſerv'd Crowns of Glory in Heaven, through the wondrous Mercy of God; and all this unmercifulneſs for a *ſmall* Matter, for the Debt of a few *Pence*: This ſhews the baſeſt of *Ingratitude*, and *weak* Senſe of God's Compaſſion ſhewn to us, that is poſſible. Well may our Lord ſay to ſuch Men, with a little Variation, as the King in the Parable ſaid to that cruel Servant of his; *O thou wicked Servant, I forgave thee all that Debt, and that though thou didſt not deſire it of me; ſhouldſt not thou alſo have had Compaſſion on thy Fellow-Servant, even as I had Pity on thee?* *Obligation* ſufficient there was no Doubt; and that his

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Ingratitude, and Forgetfulness of God's Favour, and his cruel hardned Temper was very provoking, will appear in the Sequel. But,

Secondly, To be revengeful and implacable after such Mercy receiv'd our *selves*, is the greatest Baseness with Respect to *Men*.

For we are all *Fellow-Servants* of the *same* great *Lord*; and his *Mercy* has been the *same* to all of us; we are all of us through Christ, under the same Covenant of Grace and *Reconciliation*: Now *this* methinks should *endear* us to one another, and our mutual Joy for each others Happiness, should put an End to all other *petty* Quarrels and *Animosities* between us. But instead of this, to hate and mischief one another, to endeavour by all means to make one another as *unhappy* as we can here below, and with him in the Parable, pluck out Throats for *Trifles*, and become *inexorable* to any that have injur'd us; this is such an *unnatural* Piece of *Barbarity*, and betrays so much *devilliſh* Baseness of Spirit, as that every sensible Man, when he considers it, will *abominate*. 'Tis as if a Man should escape to Shoar from a Wreck at Sea, and there meet one whom Providence had bless'd with the same Deliverance; and instead of *congratulating* his *Safety*, and joyning with him in praising and blessing the Mercy of their great Deliverer, endeavour to knock out his Brains in pursuance of some *old Grudge*. Nothing can be more *base* than this, nor more justly

juſtly *provoking* to the God of *Mercy* and *Compaſſion*. Which leads me in the

Laſt Place to conſider the miſerable *Conſequence* of this Baſeneſs, *viz.* We ſhall thereby provoke God to *recall* his Pardon to *us*, and deal with us as the King in the Parable did with his wicked ungrateful and cruel Servant, *and deliver us over to the Tormentors, till we ſhall have paid all that is due unto him. For ſo likewiſe*, ſays our Lord, *ſhall my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye from your Hearts forgive not every one his Brother their Treſpaſſes.*

God's Pardon to Sinners, though it be very *full* and *free*, and given in infinite *Mercy*; yet is not paſs'd in ſuch a Manner as that it can never be *revok'd*; 'twas given at *firſt* upon *Conditions*, and may be again *forfeited* if we fail of performing what God *requires*, in order to his final *ratifying* it.

Now *Forgiveneſs of Injuries* is expreſly mention'd by our Saviour, as Part of what God expects from us in order to his *confirming* his Pardon to us; for thus, *Matth.* 6. 14, 15. *If ye forgive Men their Treſpaſſes, your heavenly Father will alſo forgive you; but if ye forgive not Men their Treſpaſſes, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your Treſpaſſes*; but, as 'tis in the Parable, his Wrath will again wax hot againſt you, and he will make void his former Pardon, and *deliver you over to the Tormentors till you ſhall pay all that is due unto him.* That is, will conſign you to the Portion

tion of the Devil and his Angels, Spirits of like malicious and revengeful Tempers, who, as the *mercileſs* Executioners of God's Vengeance, will not for ever ſpare to torment and cruciate thoſe wretched Souls, who might have eſcap'd thoſe Miſeries, and had their Pardon *ſeal'd* with the Blood of their Redeemer, but *forfeited* it again by indulging to that deviliſh Temper of *Malice* and *Revenge*.

Wherefore, to conclude this Parable. If we are touch'd with a due Senſe of the wondrous Compaſſion of God to us miſerable Sinners in forgiving us the vaſt Debt we had contracted to the divine Juſtice by Reaſon of our Sins, and which 'twas impoſſible for us ever to have diſcharg'd our ſelves; whereby we are deliver'd from the intolerable and endleſs *Puniſhment* of them; and moreover made *Sons of God*, and Heirs of celeſtial Glory: If we are duly touch'd with a Senſe of this infinite Goodneſs of God to *us* (which to effect was the Endeavour of the *firſt* Part of this Diſcourſe) let us expreſs our deep Reſentment of his gracious Forgiveneſs of *us*, by imitating ſo excellent an Example, and *forgiving one another*. Let us conſider the great *Happineſs*, that both here and hereafter will attend the Performance of this Duty; and reflect upon the endleſs Miſery that will cloſely follow the contrary. We muſt *forgive*, if we would be *forgiven*; we muſt ſhew Mercy and Compaſſion to our Brethren that offend

us,

us, if we hope to find any at the Hands of God. And let us remember, that, how *ſweet* ſoever we may fancy *Revenge* to be *now*, we ſhall find the Conſequence of it, if not ſpeedily repented of, to be *eternal Damnation.*

From which ſad Condition, and that helliſh Temper that will bring us to it, let us pray earneſtly that the good Lord would deliver us, through Jeſus Chriſt our merciful Saviour.

The PRAYER.

I.

O Holy and moſt merciful King of Heaven, who haſt forgiven a World of miſerable Wretches an infinite Debt, and deliver'd thoſe who had nothing to pay from the extremeſt and eternal Miſery, and haſt commanded that in Return we do to others as thou haſt done to us; I who am a happy Sharer in thy wondrous Compaſſion, do praiſe thee from the Bottom of my Soul, and earneſtly entreat the Aſſiſtance of thy Grace, that I may never be wanting in a ſincere and chearful Imitation of thy bleſſed Example, but delight to copy after ſo lovely an Original, and freely and intirely forgive, nay love and do good to my moſt inveterate Enemies. And ſince thou loved'ſt us firſt, and didſt prevent us with the Riches of thy

Goodness, O that I could in this resemble thee too, and even court my Injurers to Peace and Reconciliation, and with a Christian Bravery of Spirit, offer them that forgiveness which *they will not ask! This is indeed a hard Saying to my deprav'd Nature, and Revenge seems sweeter far to Flesh and Blood; and though my Reason, I confess, is satisfied of the great Excellency of the Performance, yet my Passions, I must with Shame own likewise, run violently the contrary Way, and bear me down with their rapid Course. Thy Aid I therefore beg, Almighty God, and that thy Spirit may enable me to stem this dangerous Current, and strenuously to resist and master all Motions to revenge, remembring that this is the Condition of my own Forgiveness at thy Hands, and that Judgment without Mercy shall be my Portion if I shew no Mercy.*

II.

Convince me daily more and more of my base Ingratitude to thee, and inhumane Barbarity to my Brethren, in bearing Malice and Rancour for trifling Injuries (such are the greatest we can offer to each other, in Compare with what thy Mercy hath forgiven us:) And do thou, O meekest Jesus, sweeten our Tempers, and turn all Bitterness of Spirit into Love and mutual Endeavours to promote each others Happiness; and may we all conspire in offering up our joint Praises to our merciful God, who has remitted to every one of us infinitely more than Ten Thousand Talents. O that this thy Mercy may be im-

imprinted in lively and everlaſting Characters upon my Soul, ſo as powerfully to incline me to tranſcribe it in my intercourſe with Men! Then ſhall I experience the bleſſed Influence this thy *Commandment will have upon my Happineſs even here, and in the moſt acceptable Manner expreſs my Thankfulneſs for thy Pity ſhew'd to me; and at the laſt by bearing this thy Badge upon my Soul, be own'd by thee as thy true Diſciple, and receiv'd into the Joy of thee our deareſt Lord. Which grant O moſt compaſſionate Jeſus for thine own Mercies Sake.* Amen, Amen.

PARABLE V.

Of a King that made a Marriage for his Son.

Matth. xxij. 2, 3. Luke xiv. 18, 19, 20. Matth. xxij. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.

Matth. 22. 2. *The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a certain King, that made a Marriage for his Son,*

And sent forth his Servants to call them that were bidden to the Wedding: And they would not come.

Luke 14. 18. *And they all with one consent began to make Excuse: The first said unto him, I have bought a Piece of Ground, and I must needs go and see it; I pray thee have me excused:*

And another said, I have bought five Yoke of Oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.

And another said, I have married a Wife, and therefore I cannot come.

Matth. 22. 4. *Again he sent forth other Servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold I have prepared my Dinner: my Oxen and*

and my Fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the Marriage.

But they made light of it, and went their Ways, one to his Farm, another to his Merchandise:

And the Remnant took his Servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

But when the King heard thereof, he was wroth: And he sent forth his Armies, and destroyed those Murderers, and burnt up their City.

Then saith he to his Servants, the Wedding is ready, but those that were bidden were not worthy.

Go ye therefore into the High-ways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the Marriage.

So those Servants went out into the High-ways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good: and the Wedding was furnish'd with Guests.

And when the King came in to see the Guests, he saw there a Man that had not on a wedding Garment:

And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding Garment? And he was speechless.

Then said the King to the Servants, Bind him Hand and Foot, and take him away and cast him into outer Darkness: There shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth.

For many are called, but few are chosen.

THis Parable, I suppose, was in its *first* Intention, designed to reprove the hardned *Infidelity* of the *Jews*, their obstinate-

ly *rejecting* the Mercy of God to them in *Christ Jesus*, and their vile *Ingratitude* to him for his *peculiar* Care of them, in so ordering it, that the Gospel should be *first* preach'd to *them* (to which Purpose also was spoken the Parable of the wicked Husbandmen in *Mat.* 21. 33. which, for its great Affinity to the first Part of this Parable, and intire Relation to the Jews, I thought fit to pass by) and it was likewise intended to shew God's great *Anger* against them for that their *Stubbornness* and malicious Treatment of Christ and his Apostles, and how sad the Consequence of it would be, both in this World and the next: And withall, to declare God's Purpose of receiving the *Gentiles* into the Fold of Christ, upon *their* despising and rejecting that inestimable Favour, and moreover, that *whoever* makes Profession of *Christianity*, must *live* agreeably, and be conformable to all its holy Laws, or else their Condition will be more deplorable than ever. This, I think was the *first* Intention of this Parable.

But besides this, it has another Aspect which is intirely *Christian*, and is full of Reproof and Instruction to us that have *already* embrac'd the Discipline of Christ, and is very aptly expressive of these Four Things, which I shall make the Subject of the following Discourse.

First, It is lively expressive of the *Nature* of the *Gospel* or Christian Religion, as representing it by the *Marriage of a King's Son*, and the

poor

poor and the *maim'd*, the *halt* and the *blind* being call'd in to partake of the *Wedding Supper*.

Secondly, Of God's great Care in having this Religion *publiſh'd* and made known to *all Men*, and his repeated *Invitations* to all Men to *embrace* it; repreſented by that King's *ſending forth his Servants to call them that were bidden to the Wedding, and again ſending forth other Servants, and commanding them to tell thoſe that were bidden that he had prepar'd and made all things ready, and therefore to urge them to come unto the Marriage.*

Thirdly, It very aptly expreſſes, what kind of *Reception*, this *holy Religion*, and the Teachers of it are like to meet with in the World; repreſented here by Mens making *light* of the Invitation to the Marriage of the King's Son, and offering *Excuſes*, ſuch as, of having *bought a Piece of Ground*, and a *Yoke of Oxen*, and of having *married a Wife*, and that theſe things would engage their Time, and therefore they could not come: And accordingly, going their own Way, *one to his Farm*, and *another* to his *Merchandiſe*, and the reſt taking thoſe Servants that came to invite them, and *intreating them ſpitefully, and ſlaying them.*

Fourthly, It expreſſes how ſad their Condition will be, that either when they are invited to, yet *reject* this holy Religion, and abuſe the Preachers of it; or elſe, though they do *profeſs* it, yet *live* not *agreeably* to it. The *latter* of which is repreſented by the

King's finding a Man at the Marriage Supper that had not on a *Wedding Garment*, and saying unto him, *Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a Wedding-garment*? And the Man's being *speechless* upon it, and the King's commanding his Servants to *bind him Hand and Foot and take him away, and cast him into outer Darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth*: And the *former* is express'd by the King's being wroth with those that *slighted* his Invitation, and pronouncing them *not worthy* of it, and resolving that they should not *taste of his Supper*, and sending his Servants to invite *others* to the Wedding, and commanding his Armies to go forth and *destroy those Murderers*, that had spitefully entreated and slain his Servants, and to *burn up their City*.

And then after all, there is a general Observation drawn from hence, namely, *That many are called, but few are chosen*. Of each of these I shall discourse in their Order.

First, this Parable does very *lively* express the *Nature* of the *Gospel* or Christian Religion; represented here by the *Marriage of a King's Son*, and the *poor* and the *maim'd*, the *halt* and the *blind* being call'd in as Guests to partake of the *Wedding Supper*.

St. *Paul*, in his Epistle to *Titus*, *Chap.* 2 *Verse* 14. says, that *Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and* purifie *to himself a peculiar* or purchas'd *People*

(as

(as 'tis in the Original) *zealous of good Works*; and *Ephes.* 1. 14. Christians are called the *purchas'd* Possession: In Allusion, I suppose, both to the *Jewish* Custom of the Man giving a *Dowry* to her whom he made his *Wife*, thereby *purchasing* her to himself as his own Peculiar; and likewise to a Custom of the *Grecians*, who had an Officer on purpose to *educate*, and *form*, and *refine* Women design'd for Marriage, and then to present them to those that were to be their Husbands: Agreeable to which is that of St. *Paul*, 2. Cor. 11. 2. *I have espous'd you to one Husband, that I may present you as a pure and chast Virgin unto Christ.* And accordingly, our Lord often compares *himself* to a *Bridegroom*, and his *Church* to the *Bride*, and his *Disciples* to the *Children of the Bride-Chamber*, or the Friends and special Attendants of the Bride and Bridegroom. And *Ephes.* 5. 35. *Christ lov'd the Church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctifie and cleanse it by the washing of Water by the Word, that he might present it to himself, a glorious Church, not having Spot or Wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without Blemish:* And then, *Verse* 30. *we are Members of his Body, of his Flesh, and of his Bones* (according to what is said of Man and Wife, *Gen.* 2. 24. *They two shall be one Flesh*) and *Verse.* 32. *This is a great Mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*

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The Gospel then, or Christian Religion being likened to a *Marriage* made by *God*, the glorious King of Heaven, for his *eternal Son*; and *Christ* the Promulger of this Gospel, the first Teacher of this Religion, being *that Son of God*, and that Divine *Bridegroom*, and the *Church*, or those that believe this Gospel, and embrace this Religion, being the *Bride*; it informs us in *general*, that the *Nature* of the *Gospel*, or Christian Religion, is like that of *Marriage*, and makes the *same Relation* between *Christ* and *Believers*, as *Marriage* does between a *Man* and his *Wife*; and intitles to like *Priviledges*, and obliges to like *Duties*, and is productive of like *Effects*.

First, the Gospel or Christian Religion makes the same *Relation* between *Christ* and *Believers*, as *Marriage* does between *Man* and *Wife*, i.e. the *nearest*, the *dearest*, and likewise an *inseperable Relation*: For, that Marriage is the *nearest* Relation, is evident from what is said *Gen.* 2. 24, that a Man shall *leave Father and Mother, and cleave to his Wife*; 'tis the *dearest* Relation, becaufe a Man's Wife is as *himself*, *Bone of his Bone*, *and Flesh of his Flesh*, as *Eve* was of *Adam*, and *no Man* ever yet *hated* his *own Flesh* (as St. *Paul has it*) but *nourisheth and cherisheth it*; *and Men ought to love their Wives as their own Bodies*; and he that *loveth his Wife still loveth himself*: And 'tis an *inseparable* Relation likewise; for though *God* permitted *Divorce* to the *Jews* for the Hardneſs

neſs of their Hearts, and *Chriſt*, in ſome Caſes, and for the ſame Reaſon permits it to us *Chriſtians*, yet from the *Beginning* it was not ſo; and thoſe whom God had ſo *nearly* joyn'd together, were not at *firſt* intended ever to be *put a-ſunder* but by Death.

In like manner the Goſpel or Chriſtian Religion does 1. create the *neareſt* Relation between Chriſt and Believers; it makes us *Members of his Body, of his Fleſh, and of his Bones*; as was before quoted from St. *Paul*, *Epheſ.* 5. 30. *i. e.* it makes us as *near* to him as the *Members* are to the *Head*, the *Fleſh* and *Bones* to the *Body*; or as our Church expreſſes it, it makes us *one with Chriſt and Chriſt with us*: 'tis *ſo* near a Relation that nothing can ſufficiently expreſs it but what expreſſes an *Union*. It creates likewiſe 2. the *deareſt* Relation, for thus our Lord, *John* 14. 21. *He that hath my Commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me ſhall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifeſt my ſelf unto him*; and Verſe 23. *We will come unto him and make our Abode with him*, and Chap. 15. 14.. *Ye are my Friends if ye do whatſoever I command you.* And *Rev.* 3. 20. *Behold*, ſays our Lord, *I ſtand at the Door and knock*; *if any Man hear my Voice and open the Door, i. e.* by Faith and Obedience, *I will come in unto him, and ſup with him and he with me*; he will ſhew the greateſt Expreſſions of Dearneſs and Affection to him. And as the Goſpel makes

makes the *nearest* and *dearest* Relation between Christ and Believers, so that Relation is 3. *inseparable*; *i. e.* unless we wilfully *divorce our selves* from him by *Apostacy* or *Disobedience*. Thus a little before his Ascension he tells his Apostles, and in them all faithful Believers that observe whatsoever he hath commanded, that he will be *with them always, even to the End of the World*: And because he was to ascend to *his* Father and *their* Father, to *his* God and *their* God; therefore says he, *I will not leave you comfortless, but will pray to the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever*, *John* 14. 16. and in the 2. and 3. Verses of that Chapter, *I go to prepare a Place for you, and if I go and prepare a Place for you, I will come again and receive you to my self, that where I am, there ye may be also*. And *John* 10. 27, 28. *My Sheep hear my Voice and I know them and they follow me; and I give unto them Eternal Life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my Hand*. And St. *Paul* with great Assurance asks this Question, *Rom.* 8. 35. *Who shall separate us from the Love of Christ?* and after enumerating what in the esteem of the World was most likely to do it, he concludes verse the last, that *nothing shall be able to seperate us from the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*. And he is likewise in a *spiritual* Manner always with us in the Reception of those Mysteries which he instituted in *Remembrance* of him. The

The Goſpel then, effecting ſo *near* ſo *dear*, and ſo *inſeparable* a Relation between Chriſt and Believers, that nothing can ſo fitly reſemble it as the State of *Marriage*; we may from hence collect in the next place, what *Priviledges* the Goſpel intitles Believers to, by reaſon of this their ſo *intimate* Relation to *Chriſt*.

As *firſt*, it intitles to the peculiar *Love* and *Tenderneſs* of Chriſt, ſuch a Love as will incline him to promote the *Happineſs* of Believers, and to *pity* and compaſſionate their *Infirmities*, Failures and Imperfections; for Love covereth a Multitude of Faults. Thus the Apoſtle, *Col.* 3. 19. *Husbands love your Wives and be not bitter againſt them*; be not extreme to obſerve every little Defect and Failing in them, but conſider 'em as the weaker Veſſel, and bear with their Infirmities. And accordingly the Author to the *Hebrews* ſays of our Lord, he is not one that cannot be touch'd with a Senſe of our Infirmities, but knows and pities them, having been in all Points tempted as we are, though without Sin, *Heb.* 4. 15. And as for his *Tenderneſs* and Care of our *Happineſs*, 'tis miraculouſly evident in that *he gave himſelf for us*, ſacrific'd his very *Life* for our reconciliation to his offended Father, *that he might ſanctifie and cleanſe us, and preſent us to himſelf a glorious Church, not having Spot or Wrinkle or any ſuch thing, but that we ſhould be holy and without Blemiſh*; as the Apoſtle expreſſes it in the before cited *Eph.* 5. 26. *&c.*

And

And he does continually *nourish* and *cherish* us by the Communications of his Grace in the blessed Sacrament (that spiritual Body of his, *which whoso eateth of shall live for ever*) and by the Comforts and Assistances of his holy Spirit. And to lye thus in the Bosom of the *Son of God*, to have such great Degrees of his Love and Tenderness to us express'd in such *amazing* Instances; to be thus *pitied* and commiserated, and our Failures excus'd and *past by*, by him that is to be our *Judge*; and our *Happiness* in all Respects so carefully endeavoured by *him* who is the *Fountain* of it: This is such a Priviledge as can never be enough valu'd, and is infinitely above the Reach of any Comparison.

Another Priviledge the Gospel intitles Believers to upon their so near Relation to Christ, is Christ's *Protection* of them from *Dangers*, and *Defence* against *Assaults of Enemies*. For, as in Marriage the Husband is the Shield and *Guardian* of his Wife, so Christ is the *Protector* and Defender of the faithful; he covers them from the Rage and Malice of unreasonable *Men*, and arms them against the Attacks of the Spirits of Darkness, by the Supplies and Aids of his blessed Spirit; *who helps our Infirmities, and strengthens us mightily in the inner Man*, so that the Gates of Hell, all the infernal Powers shall not be able to prevail against us. And accordingly says St. *Paul*, *I can do all things through Christ that strengthneth me*, *Phil.* 4. 13. *Rom.* 8. 37. *In all these things, Tribulation*

lation, Distress, Persecution, Famine, Nakedness, Peril or Sword, in all these things we are more than Conquerors. By what means? why *through Christ that loveth us.* And our Lord says expressly in the forecited *John* 10. 27. *My Sheep that hear my Voice shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my Hand.* And if the Almighty Son of God be for us, and takes us into his own Protection, and shields and guards us as a Husband does the Wife of his Bosom; who then can be against us? *We shall be hid under his Wings, and safe under his Feathers, his Faithfulness and Truth shall be our Shield and Buckler.* And, *to dwell thus under Defence of the most High, and abide under the Shadow of the Almighty,* is, no doubt, an inestimable Priviledge.

Again, as the Husband confers *Honour* upon his Wife, intitles *her* to a Share in that Honour that is due to *him*; so Believers, by their intimate Union with Christ, are advanc'd to the *highest* Step of Honour that *Mortals* can arrive at; For, what more honourable than to be in so near a Relation to the most glorious Son of God! Accordingly the Scripture exhorts us to walk *worthy* of our holy Profession, *Ephes.* 4. 1. and to have our Conversation as *becomes* the Gospel of Christ. And agreeably said our Lord to the Seventy Disciples, whom he sent as Harbingers to the Places whither he himself intended to come, *he that despiseth you despiseth me*; and 'tis in some Proportion true of all other sincere Believers. *Christianity* is a most

honour-

honourable Profession, and what *David* said to *Saul*, when he offered him his eldest Daughter to Wife for his great Services; *who am I, and what is my Life or my Fathers Family in* Israel, *that I should be Son-in-Law to a King?* 1 Sam. 18 18. may with infinitely greater Reason be said by every true Christian, *who am I, and what is my Life, that I should be taken into the nearest Relation to the eternal Son of the Majesty of Heaven and Earth!* No Title comparable to this, no Relation so much to be glori'd in, nor any Care too great to *live up to* so august a Character. But,

In the last place, the Gospel intitles Believers, as to a Participation in some Degree of the *Honour* of Christ, so likewise of his *Glory* and *Happiness*. And, as a Husband is to provide for his *Wife* suitable to his *own Quality*, and make her a Sharer in his Happiness and *Prosperity*; so will Christ confer upon sincere Believers a *plentiful Share* of his *Glories* and *Felicities* in *Heaven*.

Thus, a little before his Passion, *in my Father's House*, says he, *are many Mansions, and I go to prepare a Place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to my self, that where I am there ye may be also.* John 14. 2, 3. And in that solemn Prayer to his Heavenly Father, *John* 17. 22. *The Glory*, says he, *which thou gavest me I have given them*; and Verse 24. *Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me*

where

where I am, that they may behold thy Glory which thou hast given me, i. e. may share in the Beatifick Vision, which is the *Summit* of all Happiness And *Rom.* 8. 17. St. *Paul* says *we are joint Heirs with Christ, and if we suffer with him, i. e.* still continue faithful Believers notwithstanding the Discouragements and Temptations of the World, *we shall be glorified together.* And 1. (*or.* 14. 23. Christ is call'd the *first Fruits* of a glorious Resurrection to immortal Bliss, which supposes a general Harvest to follow *Christ the first Fruits, afterwards those that are Christ's at his coming. For the Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a Shout, with the Voice of the Arch-Angel, and with the Trump of God, and the Dead in Christ shall be raised first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, and so shall we ever be with the Lord,* 1 *Thes.* 4. 16 17 And if to all this we add, that this intimate Union of Believers with Christ, as of a Wife with her Husband, and these immense Priviledges that are consequent upon it, will be *everlasting*; that *nothing* can put *asunder* whom God has in infinite Mercy joyn'd thus *close together*, but our wilful Unfaithfulness to this our Divine Husband: As it will make up the Account of the Wonders of God's Love to the Children of Men, and should in Return, make *us* all over Love and Gratitude to that good God who hath done such great things for us; so it should

make us exceeding careful upon no Considerations whatever to divorce our selves from this our glorious Husband, but for ever pay all possible Love and dutiful Obedience to him. Which brings me in the next place to shew, that as the Gospel effects the same *Relation* between Christ and Believers as Marriage does between a Man and his Wife, and intitles to the like *Priviledges*; so it obliges likewise to the like *Duties*.

And *first*, As a *Wife* is bound to bear *unspotted Love* and *Fidelity* to her *Husband*, so is every *Believer* bound to demean himself towards *Christ*. That is, to love him above all things, and to be *intirely his*; not to suffer his Affections to wander after *strange* Loves, such as the *World* and the Vanities of *it*; not to be debauch'd by the Devil and his Temptations, and share his Heart between *Christ* and *Belial*. But, since *our Maker is our Husband*, as the Prophet *Isaiah* expresses it, *Isaiah* 54. 5. to be intirely faithful to him, and admit no Creature to that Dearness of Affection which he alone should have.

For this is that Crime which the Scripture calls spiritual *Fornication* and *Adultery*, and which St. *Paul* told the *Corinthians*, he began to fear they were guilty of; *I am jealous over you*, says he, *with a Godly Jealousie, for I have espous'd you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste Virgin unto Christ*; *But I fear, lest by any means, as the Serpent beguiled* Eve

through

through his Subtilty, so your Minds should be corrupted from the Simplicity, or Purity and Integrity, *that is towards Christ*, 2 *Cor.* 11. 1, 2. This is that *Fornication* for which Christ will give us a Bill of Divorcement, and for ever put us away from him; *depart from me ye cursed*, &c. *Mat.* 25. 41. This is in a spiritual Sense, *to take the Members of Christ and make them the Members of an Harlot*; and these *spiritual* as well as *carnal Whoremongers and Adulterers*, *God will Judge*. And therefore, as much as it concerns us to *continue* in this near and dearest Relation to Christ, which is attended with such inestimable Priviledges; so much it concerns us to bear an *intire* and *unspotted* Love to him; *for he hath bought us with a Price, therefore we should glorifie him in our Bodies and our Spirits which are his.*

Secondly, As a Wife is bound to *submit* her self to her Husband, to *comply* with his *Government*, and *Reverence* his *Person* and *Authority*; so, and much *more* is every *Believer* bound to do to *Christ*. That is, to be *satisfied* with the Disposals of his *Providence*, to *submit* to his *Guidance* and *Conduct*, to *reverence* all the Expresses of his *good Pleasure*, to be in *Subjection* to his holy *Discipline*, to have one *Will* with him, the same Likes and Dislikes, and in no Case to oppose or resist his Sovereign Authority.

This is no more than what the Apostles command from a *Woman* to her *Husband*, (as

every one that has read their Writings knows very well) and that though they are both alike, *frail sinful Mortals*, much more then ought we to be *subject*, and bear the profoundest *Reverence to Christ our Saviour*, who is the *King of Glory, the Son of God, who upholds all things by the Word of his Power and sits on the Right Hand of the Majesty on high*; whom all the Angels of God worship, and who besides, is most *tender* and *affectionate* to *us*, and his Government directed by *infinite Wisdom*.

Thirdly, As a Wife ought not only to be subject to the Disposals of her Husband, and *passively* obedient, but likewise *actively* so, and ready chearfully to *obey his Commands*; so ought every *Believer* to be to *Christ*.

Indeed, *this* is the main Tryal of *true conjugal* Affection, and the best Demonstration of the *Sincerity* of all other Shews of Love and Fidelity, and Reverence and Submission. For where *true* Love, Reverence and Submission is, a *chearful Obedience* will surely follow; and on the contrary, where there is no willing *chearful Obedience*, there is but very *little*, if *any* sincere *Affection*. And therefore, says our dear Lord, *if ye love me keep my Commandments*: *And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say*? And of *Sarah* 'tis said, she *obey'd Abraham* as well as call'd him *Lord*. And St. *John* agreeably, 1 *John* 2. 5. *whoso keepeth his Word, in him verily is the Love of God perfected*; *and hereby know we that*

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we are in him. And therefore, *Obedience* to the *Commands* of this our glorious Husband, is above all things neceſſary to continue that our near Relation to him; *and his Commandments are not grievous*, but *his Yoke is eaſie and his Burthen light.* And 'twould be *ſtrange* if we ſhould not obey *him*, who commands us nothing but what is in its own *Nature* neceſſary in order to our Happineſs in both Worlds.

In the *laſt* place, the Goſpel is productive of like *Effects* to thoſe of Marriage, and from this ſo *near* Relation of Believers to Chriſt proceeds the Increaſe of ſuch as ſhall be the *Children* of God, a numerous Progeny to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, and fill up the Vacancies left by the Fall of the Rebellious Angels.

Thus our Lord calls the becoming *Chriſtian's* a being *born again*, *John* 3. 3. and teaches us when we pray to *God* to ſay *Our Father.* And St. *Paul* agreeably, in a Quotation from the Prophet *Jeremiah*, ſays, as in the Perſon of God, *I will be a Father unto you, and ye ſhall be my Sons and Daughters ſaith the Lord Almighty.* 2. Cor. 6. 18. And the *Jeruſalem* which is from above, or the Chriſtian Church, is ſaid to be *the Mother of us all. Gal.* 4. 26. and Chap. 3. 26. *we are all the Children of God by Chriſt Jeſus.* And if Children then *Heirs*, *Heirs of God and joint Heirs with Chriſt*, of that glorious Kingdom of his which is not of *this* World,

but eternal in the Heavens. *Well* therefore may we cry out with Admiration, as St. *John* does, *Behold what manner of Love the Father hath bestow'd upon us that we should be call'd the Sons of God!* 1 John 3. 1. *And every Man that hath this Hope in him*, of being receiv'd into the Bosom of his Heavenly Father, and *seeing him as he is*; *must purific himself even as he is pure*: And having such glorious Expectations, *cleanse himself from all Filthiness, both of Flesh and Spirit, perfecting Holiness in the Fear of God*, 2 Cor. 7. 1.

This then is the *Nature* of the *Gospel*; 'tis as a *Marriage* between *Christ and Believers*. There is one thing more to be consider'd under this *first* General, namely, who they are that are admitted to the Joys and Happiness of this blessed Condition? They are describ'd in the Parable by the *poor* and the *maim'd*, the *halt* and the *blind*. And truly, just such was Man's Condition, before God was pleased to call him to this *happy Marriage*. Despicably *poor* we were, and destitute of any real Excellency that could recommend us to the Favour of God; our Souls were like a parch'd and barren Wilderness, burnt up with vile Lusts and Passions, no Fruits of Holiness appearing, but drawing still nearer and nearer to everlasting Perdition. *Maim'd* we were in all our Faculties by our frequent desparate Falls from our Obedience to God, and full of *Wounds and Bruises, and putrifying Sores*; and

our

our beſt Performances very *lame* and imperfect like the *Haltings* of a Cripple; and our *Underſtandings* withal *blinded* by the Deceitfulneſs of Sin, which put out that Candle of the Lord, and made it uncapable of directing us in the right Way that leads to Happineſs, ſo that we lay groping in the *Dark*, ſurrounded with *Terrors*, rack'd by *Uncertainties*, miſerably poor and indigent, and utterly unable to help our ſelves. When lo! There aroſe up a *Light* in this Darkneſs, and through the infinite Mercy of our God the *Day-ſpring from on high* did viſit us, we were pitied and commiſerated by the Father of Mercies, and in this forlorn Condition, call'd to partake of the ineffable Joys and Felicities that attend the neareſt and deareſt Relation to the *Son of God. The Lord anointed him to preach the Goſpel to the poor; he ſent him to heal the broken-hearted, to preach Deliverance to the Captivas, and Recovery of Sight to the Blind, and to ſet at Liberty them that are bruiſed, Luke* 4. 18. Accordingly, he *inrich'd* our Poverty, *reſtor'd* our Sight, *heal'd* our Bruiſes, and *confirm'd* our Strength, *and of his fulneſs have we all receiv'd*; and nothing for the Future can ever make us miſerable but *our ſelves.*

Wherefore, as we ſhould adore and magnifie, with all our Souls, the wondrous Goodneſs and Compaſſion of God and our Saviour, in receiving ſuch wretched *polluted* Creatures as we were by Nature, into ſo *intimate* a Re-

lation to himself; and making us Partakers of the Comforts of his blessed Spirit in this World, and providing Crowns of Glory for us in the next: So above all things should we dread to fall back into the same Condition again, *and work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling*. For otherwise, 'twould have been better for us never to have tasted of the Divine Compassion in so extraordinary a Manner as we have done, and our latter End will be worse than our Beginning.

And thus much for the first thing to be consider'd in this Parable, namely, the *Nature* of the *Gospel* or Christian Religion, represented by the *Marriage of a King's Son*, and the *poor* and the *maim'd*, the *halt* and the *blind* being call'd in to partake of the Joys and Festivities of that great Solemnity. I proceed now to the

Second thing to be considered, namely, God's great Care in having this Gospel *preach'd*, this Religion publish'd and *made known* to all Men, and his repeated *Invitations* to all Men to *embrace* it; represented by that King's *sending forth his Servants to call those that were bidden to the Wedding, and again sending other Servants*, and commanding them to tell those that were bidden, *that he had prepar'd and made all things ready*, and therefore to *urge them to come unto the Marriage*.

How great God's Care has been that this Gospel should be *publish'd*, and how *repeated* his

his Invitations to Men have been, that they would embrace it; is evident from the whole Story of the *firſt* planting of the Goſpel, and from the Courſe, that by God's Appointment has been taken *ever ſince* At *firſt*, many were endow'd with very extraordinary Abilities for this Purpoſe, ſuch as the Gift of *Tongues*, whereby they were enabled wherever they ſhould go, to preach the Goſpel to Men in their own Native Language; and a Power of working Miracles to confirm the *Truth* of their Doctrine; and with this Meſſage and theſe ſupernatural Abilities, were they ſent to the moſt remote Corners of the Earth; even our *Britain*, as little *known*, and as *barbarous* as *then* it was, receiv'd, and that very *early*, the glad Tidings of the Goſpel. And for a Supply of the *Mortality* of the firſt Teachers of this holy Religion, that no Age might want thoſe that ſhould inſtruct Men in, and invite them to it, there was an Order of Men ſet apart on purpoſe for this great Work, and empower'd to ordain others that ſhould tread in their Steps when they were gone, and thoſe likewiſe *others*, and ſo down ſucceſſively till Time ſhall be no more; as ſo many Ambaſſadors from the great King of Heaven to perſwade Men to hearken to the Propoſals of Reconciliation made to them through the Merits and Interceſſion of his Son, and to partake of the infinite *Happineſs* that will follow upon that bleſſed *Agreement*.

Theſe,

These, like the King's Servants in the Parable, are to let Men know, what *Bliss* will be the Result of their coming to this spiritual Marriage, and entring into so near a Relation to the eternal Son of God; that all things are ready to compleat that glorious Solemnity, the Feast prepar'd, the Oxen and Fatlings kill'd, *i. e.* Heaven and the ineffable Pleasures of it ready to receive those that shall sincerely enter into this near Relation to Christ, and continue always faithful in it; and in the mean time the secret Joys of a good Conscience, and the enravishing Expectation of the Time when those Felicities shall be enjoy'd, shall unspeakably cheer and refresh the Soul, and be as so many *Antepasts of Glory*.

This is like the Course that the Lord took with the obstinate Jews, mention'd *Jer.* 25. 4. *He sent unto them all his Servants, the Prophets rising early and sending them*, they cry'd, *Turn ye again now every one from his evil Way, and from the Evil of your Doings, and dwell in the Land that the Lord hath given to you, and to your Fathers for ever; for why will ye dye O House of* Israel! Many the like pathetick Expressions there are in Scripture of God's great Desire of the Happiness of Mankind, and as earnest *Intreaties* that we would accept of those inestimable Favours he would confer upon us, as if *we* were to *confer* the Favours, and *he* to receive them.

Now,

Now, when we conſider the infinite Diſtance between *God* and *us*, what *deſpicable* Creatures comparatively the beſt of us are, *poor* and *maim'd*, *halt* and *blind*, as the Parable expreſſes it; how infinitely *perfect* and *happy* the *Divine Nature* is, and would for *ever* be, though the whole Creation were *annihilated*; ſo that *our* Righteouſneſs will not reach to *him* to make any *Addition* to *his Felicity*, nor will it be in the leaſt *profitable to him that we make our Way perfect*; and if we conſider likewiſe our great *Rebellions* againſt him, *obſtinately* perſiſted in even until *now*, the little *Deſire* we have of his Favour, the many Slights that we have made of his Overtures of Peace, and the like: We ſhall ſoon perceive, that his *Mercy* is indeed *over all his Works*, and that his Compaſſions fail not as long as there is any Hopes of our complying with his gracious Intentions for our Happineſs. And ſuch *ſtupendious* Goodneſs as this, to Creatures in our vile Circumſtances, can never be enough ador'd and magnified. Only let us remember, that the greater the Expreſſions are of God's *Love* and *Tenderneſs* to Sinners, the greater will be his *Anger*, the more ſevere his *Vengeance* to ſuch as finally *reject* it, and obſtinately *perſiſt* in their Rebellion againſt him.

The *Third* Thing expreſs'd in this Parable, is what Kind of *Reception* the Goſpel and the Teachers of it are like to meet with in the World,

World, represented by Mens making *light* of the King's Invitation to the Marriage of his Son, and offering trivolous *Excuses*, such as *of having bought a Piece of Ground, and a Yoke of Oxen*, and *of having married a Wife*, and that these things would engage 'em so that they could not come; and accordingly going their Way, *one to his Merchandise, another to his Farm*, and the rest taking those Servants that came to invite them, and *intreating them despightfully, and slaying them.*

In general, *slighting* and *undervaluing* the glad Tidings of the *Gospel, was*, and *is still*, and is too like *to be* the *Reception* of it; Mens Lusts and vile Affections diswading them from embracing so *holy* a Religion, and the *Evil of their Deeds:* making them *love Darkness rather than* this glorious *Light*, which will *discover* and *reprove* them. And Men having so little Relish for the *Religion*, have as little *Respect* for those that *preach* and *enforce* it, and endeavour to *silence* and *discourage* them by their malicious ill Treatment of them; like those in the Parable, who took the King's Servants and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. And, as in this Case it seems very strange, that those who came upon so *friendly* an Errand as to invite to the Pleasures and Festivities of so great a Marriage as that of a King's Son, should be treated so inhumanely in Return; so methinks, 'tis as strange that those whom God has sent to invite Men

to

to their *Happineſs*, and to prepare them for the Enjoyment of himſelf in Glory, ſhould be us'd like ſo many *Enemies*, and deſpis'd as the *Peſts* of Society, and the *Off-ſcouring of the Earth.*

But *ſo* it is too generally, and the Reaſon muſt be this, as St. *Paul* expreſſes it, *we are therefore look'd upon as Mens Enemies becauſe we tell them the Truth.* Becauſe we tell 'em they muſt *love* God *above all things*, and not be too *fond* of the *World*, and deny and mortifie the unruly Paſſions and Deſires of the Body, and lead this preſent Life in *Sobriety*, *Righteouſneſs* and *Godlineſs*, if they hope to partake of the Joys of Heaven; therefore we are *the Troublers of* Iſrael, as King *Ahab* ſaid to *Elijah*, and as ſuch, made the Object of Mens *Scorn* and *Hate.* But, as our Lord takes all the *Kindneſs*, Reverence and Reſpect which his Miniſters receive as done unto *himſelf*, (the Treatment of an Ambaſſador being look'd upon as the Treatment of the Prince that ſends him, *and we are the Ambaſſadors of Chriſt*) ſo on the contrary, he that ſhall treat *deſpightfully* the *leaſt* of theſe his Servants, *'twere better for him that a Milſtone were hang'd about his Neck, and he caſt into the midſt of the Sea.* But of this ſomething more in the Sequel.

Let us now conſider the *Excuſes* thoſe in the Parable made for their not going to the Marriage of the King's Son (and which are offer'd

offer'd *still* by irreligious Men) and the great *Weakness* and Invalidity of them.

The first two, of having bought a Piece of Ground, and a Yoke of Oxen, and going to see the one and prove the other, are much the *same*, and so shall be consider'd together, and they both amount to thus much, that they preferr'd the minding their own *petty* Affairs (and which might have been as well let alone till another Time) before that great Honour the King did them in inviting them to the *Marriage of his Son*: And they might well believe such Excuses would serve to no other Purpose than to provoke the King to *Anger*, when he should see his Favour made thus light of, and Mens common Business preferr'd before it.

In like manner, too many *now adays* are so weak as to plead *Business*, and the Affairs of the World, in excuse of their great Neglect of the things of *Religion*: Our Callings must be follow'd, Business must be done, our Families must be maintain'd, and therefore it cannot be expected that we can be *much* at *Leisure* for *Religion* at the *present*; when the Fatigues of *this* World begin to be *over*, and we draw near the *other*, *then* we'll give our selves up to the making *Provision* for it. And this, though few Men will *speak it out*, is the Sense of too many, as is evident from their *Practice*; and truly some make no Scruple to declare

declare this *openly*. Now, though it be very true that Buſineſs muſt be minded, and our Families maintain'd, and *Induſtry* is as much a Chriſtian Duty as any other, and is it ſelf a Part of Piety; yet it is but a *Part*, and will not commute for a Neglect of all the reſt; nay, this *Sort* of Induſtry we are ſpeaking of, is one of the *leaſt* Parts of Piety, and provided the *Neceſſaries* of Life are ſecur'd, 'tis not only *lawful*, but very *commendable* to abate of our Induſtry in the Purſuit of *this* World's Good, and lay it out upon the greater Concerns of the *next*. Thus when Jeſus came to the Houſe of *Martha* and *Mary*, and *Martha*, out of a commendable Zeal to entertain him well, was buſied in making ready Proviſions for him, while *Mary* ſat at his Feet liſtning to his Divine Inſtructions; when *Martha* complain'd to him that her Siſter had left all the Trouble to her, and deſir'd him to order that ſhe ſhould help her: Jeſus anſwer'd and ſaid unto her, *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is* above all *needful, and Mary hath choſen that good Part which ſhall not be taken from her*, Luke 10. 40, *&c.*

And accordingly, in his Divine Sermon on the Mount, *Mat.* 6. 24, 25. *Ye cannot ſerve God and Mammon*, ſays our Lord, *therefore take no Thought, i. e.* no anxious over eager Concern, *for your Life, what ye ſhall eat or drink, or wherewith be clothed; but* Verſe 33.

ſeek

seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you, for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Seek ye *first* the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, let it be your *principal* Endeavour to be rich *towards God*, and abound in *good Works*, and then a *moderate* Care for the Things of *this* Life, will, with God's Blessing, which alone can give Prosperity, be sufficient. And therefore, to do as is too commonly done in the World, and first provide, with great Care and Industry, for Abundance *here*, and then at last think a little of the *Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, is such an ungodly and unreasonable Course, as can never end in any thing but bitter Remorse at last, and utter Confusion; so vain and frivolous is this first Excuse Men offer for their not entertaining Religion so affectionately as they should do, namely, that they have bought Farms and Oxen, and must look after *them*, *i. e.* are deeply engag'd in the Affairs and Business of *this Life.*

The other Excuse offer'd in the Parable for absenting from the Marriage of the King's Son, was the having *married a Wife*; the Man was so taken up with the Pleasures of his *own* new Condition, that he had no Appetite for those at the King's Son's Wedding.

And *this*, as little of Validity as it has in it, is in Effect very often pleaded by Men, against

againſt their medling with *Religion* at leaſt at *preſent*. They are *young* they ſay, and in the Age of Pleaſure and Jollity; the Enjoyments of the *World* are very *ſweet* to 'em; and Religion is too *auſtere* for them as *yet*; what *Pleaſures* are ſaid to be in it are of a Nature *contrary* to their *Propenſions* and Inclinations; and therefore they deſire to be excus'd if they don't leave theſe preſent Satisfactions but enjoy them while they can, and *afterwards* 'tis likely they may advert to the Pleaſures of *Religion*, which, though they have heard ſo much *Talk* of, they can't frame any ſo lovely Idea of them, as to incline them to leave what by *Experience* they find ſo grateful to them. And this, not only the *Practice* of moſt younger Perſons expreſſes, but many are ſo forſaken of Reaſon as to *own* it *plainly*.

But, ſince they talk of *Experience*, I dare appeal even to *themſelves*, whether they have not met with more *Diſappointment* than *Satisfaction*, from the greateſt ſenſual Pleaſures they have enjoy'd? The thing is too *notorious* to be *deny'd*; and they *tacitly* confeſs it by *ſhifting* Pleaſures ſo often as they do; for where there is *Satisfaction*, what need of *Change*? and I may likewiſe *boldly* aſſert *this*, from the Experience of very many that have taſted both Sorts of Pleaſures, thoſe of the *World* as well as of *Religion*, that there is no Compariſon between the one and the other, and that the Satisfaction that flowes from a

sincere Religion, is infinitely to be preferr'd before the most *studied* Gratifications of Sense; nay, even those Pleasures of Sense relish much better for being season'd with Religion: So that to neglect *Religion* out of a Fondness for *Pleasure*, is as if a Man should run from a *Fountain* because he is parch'd with *Thirst*. No Pleasures certainly like those of *Religion*, and he that once drinks of those Rivers of Delight that flow from *her*, will never thirst again after the tainted Puddles of *brutal* Enjoyments, for *her* Ways only are Ways of sincere and *unmix'd* Pleasure, and *all* her Paths are *Peace*.

But supposing the Pleasures of this World to be *indeed* as great, as some Men, after all their *Baulks* and *Disappointments*, will still *fancy* them to be; and that Religion is an *austere* and *rugged* thing, and but little or no Delight and Satisfaction to be met with in the Practice of it; yet, since the Pleasures of the *World*, how *great* soever, are very short and momentary, and must certainly *die with* us, nnd generally leave us long *before* we die; and since *Religion*, how unpleasant soever here, will secure to us the Enjoyment of unconceivable Pleasures that are for ever in the Presence of God: No rational Man but will think it a very childish Excuse for the Neglect of *Religion* to plead our Fondness of the Gaieties and Enjoyments of *this* World. 'Tis like a Child's slighting a Wedge of Gold, and rather pursuing

ing an *empty* Bubble becauſe it ſhines and *glitters.*

So utterly without Excuſe are thoſe who deſpiſe and reject the Offers of the Goſpel and the Invitations to *Religion*, upon Account of the Riches and Pleaſures of the *World* ; or indeed upon any other Account whatever : For, Religion is our *chief* Intereſt, and therefore nothing can ſtand in Competition with it. Thoſe that *put by* the Thoughts of it till a more *convenient* Time, that is, till they are fit for nothing elſe, are no doubt very highly diſpleaſing to the great Author of it ; but thoſe are much *more* ſo, who totally and *inſultingly reject* it. To *defer* the great Buſineſs of Religion is a very heinous Provocation ; but Atheiſtically to *oppoſe* and vilifie it is certainly much worſe. Which leads me to the

Fourth thing expreſs'd in this Parable, namely, the Sadneſs of their Condition, who, when they have *heard* of, either totally *reject* this holy Religion, and abuſe thoſe that invite them to embrace it ; or elſe, though they *profeſs* it, are negligent of its *Duties*, and live not *agreeably* to it. The *firſt* of theſe is repreſented by the King's being *Wroth* with thoſe that made *light* of and complyed not with his Invitation to the Marriage of his Son, and pronouncing them *unworthy* of that *Favour*, and that they ſhould *not taſte of his Supper*, and ſending his Servants to invite *others* to the Wedding ; and commanding his Armies to go

and *destroy* those Murderers, that had *spitefully entreated and slain his Servants*, who brought the gracious Invitation to them, and to *burn up their City*.

And indeed, well may God's Wrath be kindled against those that reject these wondrous Expressions of his Love, and trample under Foot the Son of God, and despise and vilifie his holy Religion, and undervalue all his Condescentions, and use his Ambassadors despitefully, and call the whole a *Trick*, a State-Juggle, and glory in their Infidelity, and too often *blaspheme* that blessed Jesus, by whom alone cometh Salvation.

These Men will do well to consider, that if it should prove *true*, that there is no other Name by which we can be sav'd, but that of *Jesus*, *their* Case will be infinitely miserable who have *not believ'd* in that Name, but made it their Business to prophane and *ridicule* it as much as was possible; but should it prove *not true*, their Belief in it will not at all be *injurious* to them either in *this* World or in the *next* should there be any after this. And therefore, since the wittiest Infidel in the World cannot prove but that 'tis *possible*, and *may* be *true*, that Jesus is the only Saviour of the World, and the Consequence of *not* believing in him, being so sad should it at length prove indeed to *be true*; certainly it must be the most *prudent* Course to be of the *surest* Side, and embrace that Faith, which if *true*,

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is the only Way to Happineſs; and if *falſe* will not however *leave* a Man in any Reſpect in a worſe Condition than it found him.

How *ſad* the *Conſequence* will be of not believing in Jeſus as the only Saviour of the World, and of rejecting the Religion he taught, is expreſs'd in this Parable by the King's pronouncing thoſe that would not come to the Marriage of his Son, to be *unworthy* of that Favour, and reſolving that they *ſhould not taſte of his Supper*, and ſending his Servants to invite *others* to the Wedding: Which was *literally* verifyed upon the *obſtinate Jews*, and will be as *effectually* upon all *other Infidels*. That is, Men's obſtinate Infidelity ſhall at length be repay'd with God's *withdrawing* that Favour which he ſo long *tender'd* them and they *refus'd*, and putting an End to their Day of Grace and Salvation, and *ſealing* 'em up (as irreclaimable) to Deſtruction. *Becauſe I have called and ye refuſed* (ſays *Solomon*, perſonating *Chriſt* or the Divine Wiſdom) *I have ſtretch'd out my Hand and no Man regarded, but ye have ſet at nought my Counſel, and would have none of my Reproof, I alſo will laugh at your Calamity and mock when your Fear cometh; when your Fear cometh as Deſolation, and your Deſtruction as a Whirlwind; when Diſtreſs and Anguiſh cometh upon you, then ſhall they call upon me but I will not anſwer, they ſhall ſeek me early but they ſhall not find me*, Prov. 1. 24. *The things that belonged to their*

Peace, which *once* were tender'd and made known to them, *shall then be hid from their Eyes*. And no Condition can be so miserable as theirs, who by obstinate Infidelity, put themselves out of all *Possibility* of Salvation.

The sad Consequence of using those spiritual Persons contumeliously and despitefully who come as *Ambassadors* from God with these glad Tidings of Salvation, is express'd in the Parable, by the King's *sending forth his Armies to destroy those Murderers and to burn up their City*; which was likewise *literally* fulfill'd in the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and shall be as effectually verify'd upon those wicked Men who vent their *Spleen* against the *Religion* upon those that *preach* it, and vilifie and abuse and trample upon the one because they hate the other. But Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord; and a fiery Destruction, even that of Hell, shall (without a deep Repentance, which we beseech God to grant them) be the Portion of those whose Malice was so inveterate against Men sent from God to invite them to *Salvation*.

This is the Case of such, as when they have heard, totally *reject* this holy Religion, and *abuse* and vilifie those that perswade them to embrace it. And their's is as bad, who tho' they *profess* it, are negligent of its *Duties*, and live not *agreeably* to it: Which is express'd in the Parable by a King's finding *a Man at the Marriage Supper that had not on a Wedding Gar-*

Garment, and ſaying unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a Wedding Garment? And the Man's being *ſpeechleſs* upon it, and the King's commanding his Servants *to bind him Hand and Foot and take him away and caſt him into outer Darkneſs, where ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of Teeth.*

This is in Alluſion to what was cuſtomary in thoſe Eaſtern Countries, the having peculiar *florid* Sort of Garments, on purpoſe to grace ſuch feſtival Solemnities, and none being permitted to taſte of thoſe Feaſts, but who had ſuch Garments on.

So in *Chriſtianity*, *Repentance* and Reformation of Life are the *Wedding Garment*, without which *none*, let them make never ſo ſpecious *Profeſſions*, ſhall taſte of that Happineſs which is propos'd as the Reward of believing in Jeſus. *Faith* without *Works* is *dead*, the Soul without *Repentance* is *polluted*, whatever it profeſſes to *believe*; and without real and ſubſtantial *Holineſs* no Man ſhall *ſee the Lord.* And when at the great Scrutiny in the laſt Day, God ſhall take a *View* of every Man, of the State and Condition of his Soul, that every Man may be diſpoſed of according to his Deſerts; and ſhall ask thoſe formal *Profeſſors* who have liv'd like *Heathens*, or as if *Faith alone* could ſave them, and took no Care of good Works, How came *you* in hither? How came *you* into this Society of Chriſtians not having on the Wedding Garment? What

will they be able to say in their Excuse? Will they not be like him in the Parable, confounded and ashamed, and utterly *speechless*! What will they have to plead in Bar of that dire Sentence which will then be past upon them, *bind them Hand and Foot and take them away*, &c. certainly *nothing*, but with inexpressible Horror and Despair and *Self-Condemnation* must submit to their sad Punishment.

From all this, there is in the *last* Place this general *Observation* drawn, that *many are call'd, but few chosen.* The plain Meaning of which I suppose, to be this.

That though the Gospel is preach'd to Myriads of People, and all that hear of it are *invited* alike to *embrace* it, and 'tis God's good Pleasure that *all* should *be sav'd, and come to the Knowledge of the Truth*: Yet the *most* will make a very ill Use of their Liberty of Choice, and *many* utterly *reject* this Invitation; and more, though they do *embrace* it, yet become never the *better* for it, by not leading their Lives agreeably to their holy Profession. And by this means, among the *many* that are *call'd*, there will be but *few* that will approve themselves to God as *elect* or *choice* and *right good* Christians, and but *few* consequently, that will enter into the eternal Joy of their Lord; according to what our Lord said in another Place, *strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way that leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.*

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Wherefore, to conclude this Parable. As we have all of us been *call'd* and *invited* to a ſincere Faith in, and intire Obedience to the holy Jeſus, and do make open *Profeſſion* of ſuch *Faith*, and *Shew* of ſuch *Obedience*; it concerns us as much as our Souls are worth, and as we would avoid that *outer Darkneſs* where is eternal *weeping and gnaſhing of Teeth*; to take all poſſible Care that our Faith be ſo *ſincere* and *lively* as to produce *good Works*, ſuch as may *make our Calling and Election ſure*. Not to reſt contented with the *Form* of Godlineſs, or outward *Profeſſion* of Chriſtianity, but to endeavour after the *Power* of it and lead our Lives according to our Belief; to imitate our Lord's moſt bleſſed Example, and obey all his holy Precepts, and ſubmit to the Diſpoſals of his Providence chearfully, and bear unſpotted Love and Fidelity to him through the whole Courſe of our Lives. And by this means ſhall we be reckon'd among his *choice Jewels*, *elect and precious*, and be receiv'd into the *neareſt* and *deareſt*, and even an *inſeparable* Relation to him; and when this Life's at an End, be conducted by his Angels into his *glorious Preſence*, there to ſhare in his *Happineſs* to eternal Ages.

The PRAYER.

MOST *bleſſed God, the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who in infinite Mercy, and amazing*

amazing Condescension hast invited me miserable Creature (though poor and maim'd, halt and blind, and destitute of every thing that may recommend me to thee, except it be my Wretchedness) to the most intimate Union with thy glorious Son; and as the Bride of that Divine Bridegroom and enjoy his Love, and be blessed with his tenderest Regard, his Protection and Defence, and to partake of his Honour and Glory and Happiness: How can I enough praise and magnifie this thy wondrous Goodness! And with what Transports of Joy should I embrace so inestimable a Favour! But I alas! stupid as I am, and bewitch'd with the Cares and Business and Gain and Pleasures of this World, have hitherto stood in the Way of my own Happiness, and disregarded this most gracious Offer, and prefer'd every thing before this spiritual Marriage with the Son of God; or at best have deferr'd it still till some other Time, provoking thereby most justly thy Wrath and Indignation against me, and deserving to be for ever excluded thy blessed Presence as infinitely unworthy. But now, O Lord, I do earnestly repent, and am heartily sorry for so ungrateful slighting such infinite Mercy: The Remembrance of this Vileness is grievous unto me, the Burden of it is intolerable; and with the utmost Earnestness of a troubled Spirit I beg thy Heavenly Aid, that now without the least Delay I may chearfully embrace the glorious Invitations of the Gospel, and love and honour the Messengers which bring me those glad Tidings. And since

ſince my Maker is pleaſed to be my Husband, O may I be always mindful of my Duty to him, and bear him unſpotted Fidelity and Love, be his intirely, and for ever ſubmit without Reſerve to his Heavenly Government, reverence his Authority, and glorifie him with my Body and my Spirit which are his. And grant, O merciful God, I humbly intreat thee, that the Spirit of Infidelity may never poſſeſs my Soul, leſt I totally reject this bleſſed Invitation, or having embrac'd it, and enter'd into ſo near a Relation to my Saviour, again divorce my ſelf from him by entertaining ſtrange and forbidden Loves. And ſince I am ſo highly honour'd by the Son of God, O may I always be careful to preſerve the Dignity of ſo high a Calling, and not debaſe my ſelf by low ſunk brutiſh Actions; but, as befits the ſpiritual Spouſe of Chriſt, be cloath'd with the Wedding Garment of ſincere Purity and Holineſs, that ſo I may never be ſeparated from my deareſt Lord, but ever enjoy the unconceivable Happineſs of his Heavenly Kingdom. Which grant, O merciful Father, for the Sake of that bleſſed Jeſus. Amen. Amen.

PARABLE

PARABLE VI.

Of the Ten Virgins.

Matth. xxv. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.

Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto Ten Virgins, which took their Lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom.

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish,

They that were foolish took their Lamps, and took no Oil wieh them.

But the wise took Oil in their Vessels with their Lamps.

While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumber'd and slept.

And at Midnight there was a Cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.

Then all those Virgins arose, and trimmed their Lamps.

And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your Oil; for our Lamps are gone out.

But the wise answer'd, saying, not so; lest there be not enough for us and you, but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for your selves.

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And while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came, and they that were ready, went in with him to the Marriage, and the Door was ſhut.
Afterwards came alſo the other Virgins, ſaying, Lord, Lord, open to us.
But he anſwer'd and ſaid, verily I ſay unto you, I know you not.
Watch therefore, for ye know neither the Day nor the Hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh.

THough the *firſt* Intention of this Parable, as may be probably collected from the foregoing Chapter (which is a Deſcription of the ſad State that was e'er long to overtake *Jeruſalem* for the Jews obſtinate Infidelity, and their murdering their Saviour) was to urge the Jewiſh Chriſtians to a Preparation and watchful Care againſt that Time of Sorrows; and that they would be ſo wiſe as to make Proviſion for their *Safety* by being very careful that that Time ſurprize them not in *wicked Courſes*; but that living like faithful Diſciples of Chriſt, in all Obedience to his *holy* Commands, his *Providence* might watch over them and *ſecure* them from *periſhing* in that dreadful Deſtruction: Tho' this might be the *firſt* Intention of this Parable, yet I ſuppoſe it deſigned likewiſe to repreſent the Neceſſity of Mens conſtant Preparation for *Death* and *Judgment*, by a ſedulous Care and Watchfulneſs over themſelves, and diligent Practice of all Religious Duties and Obligations;

ligations; Because 'tis very *uncertain* when God will summon any of us to leave this World and appear before his *just Tribunal*, and his Call may be very *suddain* and unexpected; and because the Consequence of being *unready* and not *fit* to *obey* it, will be inexpressibly *miserable*. *Watch therefore*, says our Lord in the Conclusion of this Parable, *for ye know neither the Day nor the Hour when the Son of Man cometh.*

In my Discourse upon this Parable thus understood, I shall do *two* things.

First, I shall give a particular *Interpretation* of the Parable, and shew how aptly expressive it is of the *Sense* our Lord couch'd under it. And

Secondly, I shall urge *that* upon the *Practice* of Christians which is express'd by it; namely, that they would *watch* and be *ready*, *because they know not the Day nor the Hour.*

First, I shall give a particular *Interpretation* of this Parable, and shew how aptly expressive it is of the Sense our Lord couch'd under it.

The Parable is an Allusion to a Custom among the *Jews*, of the *Friends* and Neighbours of the *Bridegroom* when there was a Wedding, conducting him to the *Bride-Chamber* with *Songs* and burning *Lamps*, and partaking of an *Entertainment* that was prepar'd for them, and *shutting the Door* when the Bridegroom was *enter'd*, to keep out the intruding *Rabble*, and afterwards admitting *none* that were not ready

ready to attend him at the Hour he came, which was *uncertain*. And the *Senſe* which our Lord couch'd under this Repreſentation is *this*: That 'tis highly neceſſary every Chriſtian ſhould be always *ready* and prepar'd by a *holy Life*, to attend the *Call* of Chriſt whenever he ſhall ſummon him out of this World by *Death*, in order to his final *Judgment*; becauſe the *Time* of that great Summons is ſo very *uncertain*; and eternal Happineſs or Miſery reſpectively depends upon Mens being *prepar'd* or *not* prepar'd for it. Now, how *aptly* and *movingly* expreſſive this Parable is of *this* Senſe will appear from the following *Interpretation* of it.

By the *Virgins* in the Parable is repreſented the Society of *Chriſtians*, thoſe that profeſs to *believe* in, and to be Diſciples of the holy Jeſus; who, like *Virgins*, ought to be *pure* and *ſpotleſs*, *innocent* and *modeſt* and *humble*, *ſober* and *temperate in all things*, *pious* and *devout*, and the like: And as the *Want* of theſe or any of theſe good Qualifications, is to a *Virgin* the greateſt *Blackening* and Diſparagement, ſo the *Want* of them in *Chriſtians* is likewiſe the greateſt *Diſhonour* to *them*; expoſes them to the Scorn and *Contempt* of God and all *good Men*; renders them *unworthy* of that *holy Name* by which they are call'd, and *defiles* and ſtains thoſe Souls which Chriſt *purified* with his *precious Blood*, that they might be his own *Peculiar*, *zealous of good Works*.

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By *half* of those *Virgins* being *wise* and half *foolish*, is represented the great *Difference* there is among those that go under the same general Character of *Christians*; some *vain* and *idle*, *careless* and *unthoughtful*, taken up with the *Gaieties* and Follies of the *World*, lavish of their *Reputation*, and *loose* in their Conversation and *Behaviour*, while others are so *wise* as to consider the *Character* they bear, and live as those that make Profession of *Holiness*, that is, with Care and *Circumspection*, Watchfulness, and a diligent and *attentive* Piety: That so they may preserve their *Honour* and the *Dignity* of their *Profession*, inviolate and *unstain'd*, and be presented as *chaste Virgins* unto Christ, that Divine *Bridegroom*, whenever he shall come.

By the *Lamps* of those Virgins, is expressed the *Souls* of Christians, which are to burn with holy Fires of *Love* and *Devotion* to *God* and their *Saviour*, and make them as so many *Lights* in this *dark* and *benighted* World; for ye are the *Light of the World*, says our Lord to his Disciples, therefore *let your Light so shine before Men that they may see your good Works and glorifie your Father which is in Heaven*, Mat. 5. 14. 16. That is, as the Souls of Christians are *illuminated* by the *Spirit* of him who is the *Father of Lights*, and in whom is no Darkness at all; as they are *warm'd* by his Influences who descended upon the Apostles in the Likeness of *Fire*, and have *Divine Affections*, by his holy

holy Breathings inkindled in them; ſo they ſhould influence the *whole Man*, and make thoſe that name the Name of Chriſt like ſo many burning and ſhining Lights in the Midſt of a crooked and perverſe Generation, ſo many *eminent* Examples of Piety and *real* Goodneſs; *ſuch*, as by their own *Practice* ſhould recommend their moſt holy Religion, and ſet before Man's Eyes the *Beauty of Holineſs* by their own *Converſation*.

By the *Bridegroom*, whom theſe *Virgins* with their *Lamps* went forth to meet, is repreſented our dear *Saviour*, that Heavenly King's Divine Son, for whom he made ſo glorious a Marriage in the Parable I laſt diſcours'd of; where the Reaſons why the Goſpel is compar'd to a Marriage and our Lord to a Bridegroom are particularly inſiſted on. And by going forth to *meet* this Divine Bridegroom is ſignify'd our *preparing* againſt his calling us from this world by *Death*, and providing againſt his Advent to *Judgment*; that is, by frequently contemplating our *Mortality*, reflecting on the *Shortneſs* and *Uncertainty* of Life, and therefore making the beſt uſe of our Time while we have it, as not knowing how ſoon our Breath may be required of us; and becauſe after Death comes *Judgment*, therefore endeavouring to make *ready* our Accounts by frequent Self-Examination, and from the ſerious Conſideration of the *Terrors* of that great Day, and the ſevere Scrutiny into our *Thoughts* as well as Words and Actions

that we must then undergo, collecting with St. *Peter*, *what manner of Persons we ought to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness, that we may be found of the great Judge in Peace*, and, as *Virgins, without Spot and blameless.* 2 Pet. 3. 11.

By the *Oyl* in the Virgins Lamps, and which they took with them in their Vessels when they went to meet the Bridegroom, is represented the *Graces* and *Vertues* of Christianity, which are the proper *Nourishment* of the *Soul* (that *Lamp of the Lord*, as *Solomon* calls it) and will brighten and enliven it as Plenty of Oyl does a Lamp, and make *the Way of the Just like a shining Light, shining more and more unto the perfect Day*; and which, when they fail, spiritual *Darkness* will follow as in a Lamp *gone out*: *And if the Light that is in you be Darkness, says our Lord, how great is that Darkness!* But the Christian Vertues were very aptly represented by *Oyl* upon these further Accounts.

First, Because *Oyl* was generally reckoned in the eastern Countries as a great part of a Mans *Riches*; and when they would express great *Wealth*, they do it by magnifying the plenty of *Oyl*. Thus *Job*, when he reflected, in his Affliction, upon his former opulent Condition, the Rock (or the stone Jar that was made use of to preserve Oyl in) says he, pour'd me out *Rivers of Oyl*, Job. 29. 6 And the Prophet *Micah*, when he represented the Impossibility of appeasing his offended God, even by the most *rich* and *costly* Offering, *will the Lord be pleas'd*, says he, *with*

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ten Thousand Rivers of Oyl? Micah 6. 7. and in abundance of Places of Scripture the increase of *Oyl* signifies the Increase of *Riches*. And therefore, to have a Soul plentifully stored with divine Graces and Vertues, whereby we lay up a *Treasure in Heaven* and become *rich towards God*, being the *greatest* and only *true* and *durable Riches*; is very aptly represented by having *Oyl* in our Vessels and our Lamps.

Secondly, *Oyl* was likewise among the Easterns a Symbol of the greatest *Honours*, as is evident from the whole Story of the Bible, where we read that at the solemn Consecration and Inauguration of *Kings* and Priests Oyl was always us'd, and that among the Jews by the Appointment of *God himself*; and is still in Use with us at the *Coronation* of our *Kings*: And therefore, very fit to represent those Christian Vertues which so highly *enoble* the Soul as to render it like to God, holy as he is holy, pure as he is pure, perfect as he is perfect; and whereby through the Merits of Christ we become *Kings and Priests to God, and shall reign with him for ever.* Rev. 1. 6.

Thirdly, Oyl was an Emblem of *Joy* and *Pleasure*, and much us'd therefore in *Feasts* and Entertainments, as is evident not only from Heathen Writers, but from holy Scripture. There we read of the *Oyl of Joy and Gladness*; and our Lord in his Directions concerning fasting, bids his Disciples not make a vain glorious Shew of it by an affected *Sullenness* and

Down Look, disfiguring their Faces as the Hypocrites did: But thou, when thou fasteſt, says he, *anoint thine Head that thou appear not unto Men to fast*; *i. e.* make Semblance rather by this means, as if thou wert going to a *Feast*. And *David*, when he recounts God's Goodness to him, says amongst other things, *thou hast prepar'd a Table for me, thou hast anointed my Head with Oyl and my Cup runneth over*, *Psalm* 23. 5: which signifies the Happiness of his Condition in general as well as his being advanc'd to the Throne of *Israel*. Many other Places there are of this Nature; but these are sufficient to shew how fitly those Christian Graces are expreſs'd by *Oyl*, which cause the greatest *Joy* and Satisfaction to a holy Soul, and the Practice of which is full of Pleasure and unspeakable Delight *Sincere Religion* is the most *chearing* thing in the World, and a good Conscience a continual Feast; Indeed, to *rejoyce* is only proper for a *good Christian*, whose Mind is clear and *undisturb'd*, and in constant *Hope* and Expectation of the Happiness of Heaven. But he, whose Mind is *rack'd* with a Sense of his *deep Guilt*, and feels the Lashes of an enraged Conscience, and is terrified with the unexpressible Fears of *Damnation*, has little Reason to have *Joy* or Comfort in any thing. *Oyl* therefore, or the Emblem of *Joy* and Chearfulness, is of nothing more aptly expressive than of the Graces of our holy Religion, *whose* Ways *alone* are indeed *Ways of Pleasantness and Joy*.

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By the Virgins *all slumbering and sleeping* while the Bridegroom *tarry'd*: is signified the *Inadvertenty* and *Frailty* of even the *best* of Men. Because this Divine Bridegroom delayeth his Coming, we are all of us too apt to *lay aside* the Thoughts of it; to think but little upon *Death* and *Judgment* as things a great Way off, and for which there will be Time enough to provide *hereafter*: And for want of due *Advertency* to these *rousing* Subjects, we are apt to grow *heavy* in our Religious Performances, and suffer spiritual *Drouzines* to creep too much upon us. This made holy *David* call upon God so often to *quicken* him in his Righteousness; and St. *Paul* to exhort his Corinthians to *awake* to Righteousness, and thus to rouze the Ephesians, *awake thou that sleepest*: Eph. 5. 14. And in this spiritual Slumber (though the unavoidable Frailty of humane Nature will in Part be accepted as our Excuse by our merciful Saviour, who *knows* and pities our *Infirmities*, yet) even the *best* of us indulge our selves too much, and enter into the Number of the *foolish* Virgins, and endanger the Extinction of our Lamp through the Decay of our Virtues, and expose our selves to many Dangers and Temptations, and frequent Falls. For this Inadvertency to that great Truth, *that the End of all things is at hand*, is one great Reason why even the *righteous* fall seven times a Day; whereas would we oftner *set our Lord before us* as coming to *judge the quick and the dead*, and

reflect, that perhaps the next Hour our Soul may be required of us by him that gave it, and so an End put for ever to our State of *Probation*, and an irreversible Sentence soon after be pass'd upon us according to our Deservings, we should not dare to be so often *mov'd* from our Duty, but be careful and circumspect and always upon our Guard, lest that Day surprize us *unawares*, and while we drowze away our Opportunity our *Lamps go out*, and the Bridegroom call before we are ready to enter with him into the Marriage Chamber, and so the *Door be shut*.

It therefore highly concerns even the *best* of us, *not to sleep as do others, but to watch and be sober, having our Loins girded about, and our Lights burning*, as our Lord expresses it, and *our selves like unto Men that wait for their Lord when he will return from the Wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh we may open to him immediately. Blessed are those Servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find thus watching; verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself and make them sit down to Meat*, and (after the Manner of Bridegrooms) *will come forth and serve them*; Luke 12. 35, *&c i. e.* will impart to them the Joys and Felicities of his heavenly Kingdom. And if he shall come in the *second* or *third Watch*, that is, in the Time most addicted to Vanity and Inadvertency, as is *Youth* and *Manhood*; *Blessed* in a more especial

cial manner *are those Servants.* And what the Angel said to the Church of *Sardis*, *Rev.* 3. 2. is very necessary Advice even to the *best* Man living, *be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain which are ready to dye; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.* And what our Lord says, *Rev.* 16. 15. deserves to be seriously consider'd; *Behold I come as a Thief, blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his Garments, lest he walk naked and they see his Shame.*

By a *Cry being made at Midnight, behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him*; is very lively and movingly represented, how *unexpectedly* the Day of Judgment shall *surprize* the drouzy World, and how *suddain*, for any thing we can tell to the contrary, the Time of *our Death* may be, which is to *us* the Foreruner of it.

Midnight is a Time of great *Silence*, and destin'd to *Rest* and a Forgetfulness of the Toils and Troubles of the Day; and *then*, suddain Outcries and Alarums are doubly scaring and affrighting, and seize with an inexpressible Confusion, Horror and Consternation. And thus, when Men are in the *Midst* of their *Wickedness*, that spiritual *Night*, employ'd in Deeds of *Darkness*, given up to Ease and Luxury, and forgetful of the great Business of working out their Salvation; then shall that Time of Sorrows steal upon them as a Thief in the Night, the terrifying *Cry* shall be made, *behold, the great Judge of the World cometh, go ye forth to meet him*: For when they shall say, *Peace* and

Safety, says the Apostle, *Then sudden Destruction cometh upon them as Travel upon a Woman with Child, and they shall not escape*, 1 Thes. 5. 3. *Then shall the Kings of the Earth and the great Men and the rich Men*, those that were thought happy upon Earth, instead of going out to *meet* this Judge, *hide themselves in Dens, in Rocks and Mountains, and say to the Mountains and Rocks, fall on us and hide us from the Face of him that sitteth on the Throne and from the Wrath of the Lamb*, for the great Day of his Wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand! *Rev.* 6. 15, 16, 17.

And no wonder if a *guilty Wretch* dreads to go *meet* his *angry Judge*; and all on the *sudden* with all his Stains and *Pollutions* about him, appear before *his* Tribunal who *hateth Iniquity and into whose Presence no unclean thing can enter*: And, who is a *consuming Fire*, to those who by their *obstinate* Impieties have provoked him to become their Enemy.

And since all this is so, a Man of any *Thought*, and that has any *Apprehension* of the *sad* Condition of being thus *surpriz'd* and hurried into the other World by so quick and unforeseen a Summons (which no Man is sure shall not be his Case, since many have been call'd away with little or no Warning, that have no more expected than we do now) a Man of any *Thought* and Apprehension of things will surely be mov'd by such Considerations to *shake off* that fatal Drouzi-

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neſs which too eaſily beſets him, and by a conſtant Attendance to his Duty and Preparation for his Departure hence, be ready chearfully to obey his great Maſter's Call, *whether at Even or at Midnight, or at the Cock-crowing, or in the Morning, leſt coming ſuddainly he find him ſleeping.*

By the *wiſe* Virgins ariſing and *trimming their Lamps* when that *Midnight Cry* was made, is repreſented the more than *ordinary* Care that even good Perſons ought to take when by *Age* or the Violence of any *Diſtemper* the Time of their Departure hence ſeems to be near approaching, to *enliven* their Piety; and by putting a *Recruit* of Oyl into their Lamps, acquiring *new* Degrees of Sanctity, and warming their Souls with greater Ardors of Devotion and holy Love, prepare to go *chearfully* to *meet their Lord. Then* is the Time, when every ſincere Chriſtian ſhould endeavour to *adorn* his Soul with all the Graces of the holy Religion he profeſſes, to improve every remaining Minute of his Time to this beſt of Purpoſes, to *redeem* the many Hours formerly miſpent in Vanity and Folly; and by frequent Contemplation of the infinite *Glory*, *Sanctity* and *Bliſs* of that heavenly World to which he then ſo ſenſibly draws near, inflame his Deſires of being at the End of his weariſome Journey to it; and *fit* himſelf for the *ſpiritual unſpotted* Enjoyments of that happy Place by having as little Commerce as is poſſible

with

with this World below, and have *his Conversation in Heaven*, which will so quickly be the Place of his everlasting Abode.

By the *foolish* Virgins saying to the *wise*; *give us of your Oyl for our Lamps are gone out*, is represented the *Want of Preparation* among the careless and *inconsiderate* for this so great and *suddain Change*; and their mighty Consternation upon it, and the vain and insignificant Courses they will take in their Surprize, to make up, if possible, their own *Defects*, by borrowing of others that have Souls better furnish'd with Piety than theirs. And by the *wise* answering, *not so, lest there be not enough for us and you*, and bidding them go rather and *buy for themselves*; is shewn that 'tis utterly *groundless* to expect at that great Day of Retribution, when every Man shall be rewarded according to his *own Works*, to fare the better for the Sanctity of *others*, and that every Man has enough to do to work out his *own* Salvation, and must keep his *Lamp* alive with his *own Oyl*, must *nourish* his *Soul* with his *own Vertue*; for there *was* never, nor ever *shall* be any *meer Man* so holy and excellent but must return this same Answer as the wise Virgins did, to such as should beg them to bestow some of their Vertues or Merits upon them, *not so, lest there be not enough for our selves and you.*

And if this be true, what will become of the Popish Doctrine of Works of *Supererrogation*? If the *best* Man in the World has but Vertue

Vertue enough to ſecure his *own* Condition, (and that through infinite *Mercy* too, and upon Account of the all-ſufficient Merits of Chriſt) where is there any left for him to beſtow upon others? But this is one of thoſe Doctrines that bring much *Money* into their *Coffers*, and therefore, right or wrong, they'll be ſure to maintain it.

By the Bridegroom's *coming* while thoſe *fooliſh* Virgins went about ſo unlikely an Employment as then immediately to furniſh their Lamps with Oyl, which before were unregarded and ſuffer'd to go out, and the *Door* before they were provided *being ſhut*; is repreſented, the *Invalidity*, *generally* ſpeaking, of a *Death-Bed Repentance*; that 'tis too *late* to *begin* to be good when the *Bridegroom comes*, and thoſe that would enter with him into the *Marriage-Chamber* muſt be *ready* and prepar'd by a previous Courſe of holy Living, and that for ſome *conſiderable* Time.

This Hurry of the fooliſh Virgins at that Time to get Oyl for their Lamps, was only the Effect of the Terrors of that *Midnight Call*; had it not been for *that*, they would have drouz'd on ſtill in their thoughtleſs Way of living, and in all Probability, had it prov'd a *falſe* Alarm, they would have return'd again to their Dream of Vanity, when this their *Fright* was a little over. And ſo it is with thoſe that think not of Repentance till *Death* and *Judgment* ſtare 'em in the Face; they are

then

then wondrous sorry for having offended God, because they see they are like to be for ever punish'd for it with the Devil and his Angels; and *wish* they had liv'd *better*, and beg God to forgive 'em, and *promise* Amendment for the Time to come: But all this very seldom proceeds from Love to *God* or his holy *Religion*, as appears by their being as bad as ever, when God has been pleased to restore them to their former Health. But, such Repentance as this is but a Piece of *Mockery*, and will not be accepted; it must be a real and thorough Change of Mind express'd in an intire Reformation of Life and Manners that will incline God to pardon and forgive. Notwithstanding all the Hurry of the *foolish Virgins* to get Oyl for their Lamps upon this suddain Notice of the Bridegroom's coming; because their Lamps were before *suffer'd to go out*, we see the Door was *shut* upon them.

By the *wise Virgins* that were *ready*, their *going in with the Bridegroom to* the Marriage-Feast, is represented the great Happiness of the sincerely good, who by holy living are *ready*, and *prepar'd* for their Departure hence into the World of Spirits. That is, as there was great Preparation made to receive the Bridegroom among the Jews, and other *Easterns*, great Joy and Festivity, and which the *Children of the Bride-Chamber*, or those that attended the Bridegroom, did partake of, singing *Epithalamiums* or nuptial Songs in Praise

Praiſe of the Bridegroom and his Bride, and rejoycing in their Happineſs, and wiſhing them long Proſperity: So, the Joys of the *higheſt Heavens* (which are the Marriage-Chamber of this Divine Bridegroom our Saviour) in the Society of innumerable Saints and Angels and glorified Spirits, are prepar'd for thoſe that love our Lord Jeſus in Sincerity; and by a conſtant holy Life, are ready to leave theſe Earthly Habitations, and enter with him into that holy Place: Where they ſhall enjoy a moſt bliſsful Eternity, for ever ſinging Hallelujah's to the Praiſe and Honour of that *glorious Name*, in which all the Nations of the World are bleſſed; *praiſing God and ſaying, Let us be glad and rejoyce and give Honour to him, for the Marriage of the Lamb is come, and his Wife hath made her ſelf ready; and bleſſed are they which are call'd to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb*, Rev. 19. 7, 9. And well is that Care and Watchfulneſs and holy *Preparation repay'd*, which will procure an Entrance into that holy Place, where Chriſt is ſitting at the right Hand of God; and make us Sharers in the Joys of Angels, and in the Happineſs of our dear Redeemer!

In the *laſt* place; by the *fooliſh Virgins* coming after the Door was *ſhut*, and ſaying, *Lord, Lord, open unto us*, and his anſwering, *I know you not*; is expreſs'd the ſad and *remedileſs* Condition of thoſe whom Death and Judgment ſurprize *unawares*, and that are not

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prepar'd by a *holy Life*. They may cry, *Lord, Lord*, long enough in the Bitterness and Anguish of their Souls, and profess that they believe in him and are his Disciples, and call'd by his Name, *that they have eat and drunk in his Presence, and that he hath taught in their Streets*, and the like: but yet, for all this, without a constant *persevering Piety*, Christ will tell them, *I know you not whence you are, depart from me all ye that work Iniquity.*

And, what inconceivable *Agonies* will those excluded Wretches then be in! What *Horror* and *Despair* will then take Seisure of their Souls! What *Outcries*, what hideous Wailings will there be! How will *some* frame fruitless *Excuses*, *Lord, we have eaten and drank in thy Presence, and thou hast taught in our Streets, &c.* while *others*, with deep Sighs in vain beg *Pity* and Commiseration, of him who never before *deny'd* it. What intolerable Anguish will they feel, to see those whom they *hated* and *despis'd* on Earth, then enter'd into the glorious Marriage Chamber of the Son of God; and *they themselves*, they who were prosperous here, and to all Appearance the Friends and Favourites of the Divine Bridegroom, eternally *shut* out from his Presence and the Joys of those celestial Regions, and left behind in unconceivable *Torments*, and in the Company of malicious *Fiends* and Devils, to linger under an Eternity of Misery! No *Words* can ever reach those Horrors, nor can

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our Thoughts *conceive* them; and may none of us ever be ſo unhappy as to *feel* them! But be ſo *wiſe* as to watch and be ready, and have our Lamps burning, and our ſelves always prepar'd for this great coming of our Lord, *for we know not the Day nor the Hour.*

And thus have I given a particular, plain and practical Interpretation of this Parable of the *Ten Virgins*, whereof five were *wiſe* and five *fooliſh*; and ſhewn as I went along how aptly expreſſive it is of the Senſe our Lord couch'd under it.

I proceed now to the other thing to be done, which is to urge that *Watchfulneſs* and *Preparation* by all manner of holy living againſt this coming of our Lord, which is neceſſary to our being admitted into his Joy; and to ſhew, how great the *Wiſdom* of ſo doing is, and how great the *Folly* of the Contrary: For thoſe that were *ready* and *trim'd* their Lamps are called *wiſe* Virgins in the Parable, and thoſe that were *not* ready, and their Lamps *out* are call'd *fooliſh.*

As for the *Folly* of not taking care to be ready and prepar'd againſt that great Change of *Death* ſhall come; it is a thing juſtly to be wonder'd at, that Men who know that one Time or other they muſt ſurely *die*, and are wholly in the Dark as to the *preciſe Time* of their Death, and that they muſt die but once, and that, without any further *Probation*, after Death comes *Judgment*; it is much to be wonder'd at that thoſe who know all this to be true, as Chriſtians

Christians are supposed to do, should live so much at *random*, and be so foolishly careless in managing their *last Stake*, so heedless in doing that *well* which admits of no *Repetition*, and which, if done *ill* they are for ever *miserable*. 'Tis the very Height of *Folly* this, and which, one would think, a Man of any Sense could not be guilty of. There is nothing that Men are more *afraid* of than dying, and yet, so strangely contradictious are they to themselves, they make the *least* Provision against this greatest Evil. In *other* matters Men are so *wise* as to endeavour to *secure* themselves against their Fears, they provide against *Poverty* by *Diligence* and *Parsimony*, against *Pain* and *Diseases* by proper *Antidotes* and Preservatives, against the Approach of *Enemies* by the best *Defence* they are capable of making, and the like; and this many times when there is only a *Probability* of these Evils coming upon them: And yet against *Death*, though they *dread* it above *all things*, and know that it will *certainly* come and are uncertain how *soon*, they make as *little* Provision as if they were *immortal* as the Angels in Heaven, what a Bundle of foolish Inconsistencies is here? They look upon Death as the *greatest* of Evils, and yet *regard* it the least of all things; they know it highly concerns 'em to make Preparation for it by a good Life, and they know the sad Consequence if it surprize 'em unawares, and they are not sure they shall not be surpriz'd the next Hour or Minute; and

yet

yet for all this they put the evil Day far from them, and by all Arts endeavour to *remove* ſuch Melancholly Thoughts as if they were reſolv'd not to *avoid* but *ſuffer* what they fear, and *ſecure* to themſelves the Miſeries conſequent upon an untimely and unprepar'd Death. And what is this, but juſt the ſame Piece of *Folly* and *Madneſs*, as for a Man becauſe he greatly dreads the *Plague* therefore to run into an *infected Houſe*; becauſe he is afraid of *Poverty* therefore to grow *prodigal* and ſquander away what he hath? And what can be more ſtrangely fooliſh and contradictious than this? Indeed, a Sinners *whole Life* is the greateſt *Folly* and *Contradiction*, but 'tis moſt groſs and *palpable* with Relation to *dying*; for, becauſe a Man loves his *Body*, therefore *ſo* to *indulge* it in *this* World as to make it become eternally *miſerable* in the *next*, and live in ſuch a courſe of ſinful Pleaſures as will be repaid with a *double* Death, is unaccountably fooliſh and againſt all the Dictates even of natural Reaſon.

I need not ſay more I think to expoſe the Folly of not making Preparation for ſo great a Change as Death will effect in every Man's Condition; or (in the Phraſe of this Parable) of not keeping *Oyl in our Lamps*, nor watching againſt the divine Bridegroom's coming, but ſlumbering in a careleſs Inadvertency to thoſe great things of Religion, *Death* and *Judgment*, till they overtake us as a *Thief in the Night*. And from what has been ſaid of the *Folly* of

not preparing for that Time of Terrors and greatest Concern to every Man, we may in a few Words collect the great *Wisdom* of being always in a *Readiness* to obey the Summons of our great Lord with *Chearfulness*.

For in short, to be *ready* and *prepar'd to Dye* when God shall please to call us, has all the *Wisdom* in it of making a constant due Provision against the greatest and most *concerning* Change that can befall us; and which we must *certainly* undergo, and how *soon* we know not, and that but *once* neither, and which will be follow'd by the final *Judgment* without any *new Opportunity* being afforded, wherein to *amend* the Errors of our then irrecoverably past Life: 'Tis to make *such* a Preparation for this great Change as may render it *advantageous* to us whenever it shall come, than which no greater Piece of Wisdom can be imagin'd: For that certainly is the greatest Wisdom that makes a Man *wise to Salvation*.

Wherefore, to conclude this Parable. Since *it is appointed to Men once to dye, and after that the Judgment*; or, in the Stile of this Parable, since Jesus the divine Bridegroom will one time come to summon every particular Member of the Christian Church, his mystical Spouse, to leave *this* World and attend him in the World of *Spirits*, there to partake with him (if ready and adorn'd with the Wedding Garment, and their Lamps burning with the Oyl of Righteousness) of the everlasting Felicities

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of his heavenly Kingdom; or elſe, if not prepar'd to appear before him *then*, to be for ever *excluded* his Preſence, and thruſt into the dire Abodes of the Devil and his Angels: Since this is ſo, let us all make it our ſincere Endeavour, by a ſerious and hearty Obſervation of thoſe holy Rules of living which our Lord has mark'd out to us as the Way to Immortality and a Preparation for his Appearance, to be always ready to go out and meet him; that we may enter with him into the Marriage-Chamber before the Door be ſhut, and not hear that diſmal Sound, *I know ye not, depart from me ye Workers of Iniquity.*

And becauſe this great Coming of the Bridegroom will be but *once*, for 'tis appointed to Men but *once* to dye, and after that but *one final Judgment*; let us by no means trifle away this *only* Opportunity of working out our Salvation in Folly and Impertinency, much leſs in *Wickedneſs* and *Vice*; but often reflect upon the Agonies we ſhall feel when we ſhall find this *one only* Life which we have ſo wretchedly miſpent, drawing to a *Concluſion*, and no Hopes of any further Opportunity to *recover* our ſelves in, but juſt as we *then* are in that deplorable *unprepar'd* Condition, be hurried away to give Account of our Works. Lord! What Confuſion muſt ſuch wretches feel, what horrid Tortures muſt needs pierce their Souls, to ſee Hell gaping to receive 'em, and no poſſibility of *Eſcape* or ſo much as a *Reprieve*, but

plunge they must into those *Lakes of Fire and Brimstone*, which yet they might have *avoided* if they would?

If this be a Case *infinitely deplorable* (and if this be *not*, certainly nothing is) then it nearly concerns us all while we have Time, that is, while this *one onely* Life does last, to make provision for a *happy Departure* out of it, by a more holy and circumspect Conversation in it. And because the Time *when* this one only Life shall end is wholly in the *Dark* to us, and *we know not the Day nor the Hour when our Lord will come*; let this awaken us into serious Thoughts and Resolutions of making the best Use of the remaining Portion of our Lives, and breaking off immediately our sinful Course of living, lest the Opportunity for so doing be gone before we think of it, and we be *surpriz'd* into endless Misery e're we are *aware*. Let us always keep our *Lamps burning*, our Souls employed in holy Meditations, and our selves in a Readiness by a good Life; and then, though it is *appointed for us all to dye*, and that but *once*, and *after that the Judgment*, and *we know not the Day nor the Hour* when the Summons shall be given: We may with *Comfort* wait for our dear Lord's appearing, and say, *Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.*

The

The PRAYER.

I.

O Glorious Jeſus! The Saviour and the Judg of Mankind, before whoſe juſt Tribunal we muſt all appear, but when, we know not, and there give Account of our Works, and be rewarded according to them; aſſiſt me, I beſeech thee, with thy Grace, that I may make it my chief Care with Cheerfulneſs and Comfort to obey thy Summons to this great Audit whenever thou ſhalt call. And to that End, grant I may be frequent in the Contemplation of my Mortality; how ſhort and frail my Life is here, how inevitably and cloſely Judgment follows Death, and how certainly the one will find me as the other leaves me. Thou holy Jeſus, though a ſtern Judge to obſtinate Rebels to thy Father, art yet the Bridegroom of thy Spouſe the Church, and infinite is thy Love to thoſe that preſerve inviolate their Fidelity to thee, and happy will they be beyond Expreſſion, who at thy glorious coming to receive thy Bride into thy Kingdom, ſhall be admitted into thy Marriage Chamber, and be for ever where thou art, and behold and partake of thy Glory. O may I therefore, like a wiſe Virgin, preſerve my Innocence untouch'd, be cloath'd with Humility, and adorn'd with a meek and quiet Spirit, and ſober and temperate in all things, having my Lamp full of Oyl, my Soul repleniſh'd with Vertue, and conſtantly burning with the Fires of Devotion and Love;

that so when the Cry shall be made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him; I may be ready to obey thy Call, though it be made at Midnight, and be found of thee our dearest Lord, as a Virgin in Peace, without Spot and blameless.

II.

I must confess with Shame and Sorrow, O merciful Jesus, that I am too prone to slumber and sleep, and forget to advert as I ought, to this thy glorious Second Advent, and the Forerunner of of it, Death; and am apt foolishly to put that Day far from me, and to think thou delayest thy coming; whereby my Oyl is wasted, and my Lamp almost gone out.

O do thou therefore quicken me in thy Righteousness, blessed Redeemer, and grant that the Consideration of the surprizing Suddainness of thy Appearance upon the Throne of Judgment, and the great Uncertainty of the Time when I shall be call'd from hence and bound over to that great Assize, there to give Account of my Works and how I liv'd and how I dy'd: Grant that this Consideration may put an End to my Spiritual Drouzineſs, and engage me in Prayer and Watchfulness, and pious sober Conversation, because I know not the Day nor the Hour. And when by the Decays of Age or Violence of Diseases my Departure into the World of Spirits seems to be near approaching: O then enable me with thy prevailing Grace, to trim my Lamp with an extraordinary Diligence, to enliven my Religion, and not

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be to ſeek for Oyl then, when my Lamp ſhould be beſt repleniſh'd with it, and burn moſt vigorouſly. O let me never truſt to the great Uncertainty of a Death-Bed Repentance, nor vainly depend upon the redundant Merit of others, ſave that of my Redeemer which is my only Hope, but now in Time of Health provide for a happy Death, leſt my Lamp being out when thou ſhalt call me to attend thee, Amazement and Horror ſeize me, and the Door be ſhut upon me. And well will my wakeful Preparation be rewarded, deareſt Jeſus, when I ſhall be admitted into thy glorious Preſence, and enjoy the endleſs Bliſſes of thy heavenly Bride-Chamber. O therefore grant me thy Grace not to ſleep as do others, but to watch and be ſober, and ſo much the more as I ſee that Day approaching. Amen. *Bleſſed Saviour,* Amen, Amen.

PARABLE VII.

Of the good Samaritan.

Luke x. 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35.

A certain Man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among Thieves which stripped him of his Raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down a certain Priest that Way, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other Side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the Place, came and look'd on him, and passed by on the other Side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: And when he saw him he had Compassion on him,

And went to him, and bound up his Wounds, pouring in Oyl and Wine, and set him on his own Beast, and brought him to an Inn, and took Care of him.

And

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out Two Pence, and gave them to the Hoſt, and ſaid unto him, take care of him, and whatſoever thou ſpendeſt more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

THis Parable was ſpoken upon occaſion of a Lawyer's asking our Lord, What he ſhould do to inherit Eternal Life? Who, upon Chriſt's referring him to his own Law, and his Repetition of the two great Commandments of *loving God with all our Hearts, and our Neighbours as our ſelves*, and Chriſt's returning to him, *this do and thou ſhalt live*; being *willing to juſtifie himſelf*, as an Obſerver of all this, ask'd this further Queſtion, and who is my Neighbour? That ſo knowing our Saviour's Senſe in that Particular, he might the better make it appear to him, that he not only *lov'd God with all his Heart*, which he thought he could ſafely affirm, but likewiſe *his Neighbour as himſelf*; and therefore ſtood fair for *eternal Life*. To this latter Queſtion Jeſus anſwer'd by the Parable above recited, and then ask'd the conceited Lawyer, *Which now of theſe Three thinkeſt thou was Neighbour to him that fell among the Thieves*, the *Prieſt* and *Levite* that were his Country-Men, Children of the ſame *Abraham*, who yet took no Charitable Notice of him, but *paſſed by on the other Side*; or the *Samaritan*, who though a Schiſmatical Stranger to the Commen-

Common-wealth of *Israel*, and an Enemy to every *Jew*, yet had Compassion on him and reliev'd and succour'd him with Charity suitable to his Distress? To this the Lawyer answer'd, as he could not choose but do, *he* was his Neighbour that *shew'd Mercy on him.* Then said Jesus immediately to him, *Go and do thou likewise.* Which Words struck so home upon his Conscience, that they put a Stop to his intended *Justification* of himself, and we hear of no further Intercourse he had with our Lord; and may imagine how he sneak'd away asham'd and confounded.

The Design therefore of this Parable is to give us a true Notion of *Charity*, or Compassion and Relief of such as are in Distress; and that both with Respect to the *Object* of it, and the *Manner* and *Measure* of *expressing* it to such Object. And therefore in discoursing upon this Parable I shall do three things.

First, I shall shew who are the proper *Objects* of this Sort of Charity, according to the true Sense and Meaning of our holy Religion.

Secondly, How we are obliged to *relieve* them, in what *Manner* and in what *Measure.*

Thirdly, What great *Encouragement* we have to this excellent Duty, with respect both to *this* World, and that *above*; or what a Blessedness it is to be able thus to *give* rather than *receive.*

First, As for the proper *Objects* of this Charity, they are in general the *really* Indigent and

and Calamitous, and ſuch as are unable to help *themſelves.* And that (without *excepting* any) whether they be Strangers and Foreigners, or Enemies, or Heathens, or Hereticks, or wicked Perſons: *All* that are *indeed* neceſſitous and helpleſs, are made by our holy and moſt merciful Religion, the Objects of our Compaſſion and Relief. Thus the Apoſtle, *As we have Opportunity, let us do good unto all Men*, Gal. 6. 10. and our Lord, *Do good to them that hate you*, Mat. 5. 44. and *Rom.* 12. 20. *If thy Enemy hunger feed him, if he thirſt give him Drink*; and in this Parable our Lord propoſes to our Imitation the Example of a *Samaritan* taking great Care of an unfortunate *Jew*, though there could be no greater *Enmity* than between the *Jews* and the *Samaritans*, and that grounded upon what of all Things makes Ill Will the moſt inveterate, *Diverſity of Opinion in Religion.* And indeed 'twould be a barbarous Piece of Cruelty and Inhumanity, if I ſhould let a Man *periſh*, without any Commiſeration or Help from me when I am able to give it him, becauſe he has formerly, it may be, been unkind or injurious to me, or is of a different Religion, and of a Nation that is in Hoſtility with that to which I belong. This certainly is not doing as I would be done to, nor loving my Neighbour as my ſelf, for every Man in a religious Senſe is my Neighbour; 'tis more like the Rage of a *Tiger* than the Bowels of a Man, or the

Malice

Malice of a *Devil* than the *Charity* of a *Christian*. As for Charity to Strangers and Foreigners, that is expresly commanded in several Places of Scripture, particularly 1 *Pet.* 4. 9. where what we translate, *use Hospitality one to another*, is in the Original, φιλόξενοι εἰς ἀλλήλους, *Be kind to Strangers*; and by the Author to the *Hebrews*, Heb. 13. 2. the Probability of receiving *Angels* unawares in that Disguise, (as *Abraham* and *Lot* did, *Gen.* 18. 3. and 19. 2.) is made the Motive to it. And how excellent a Piece of Charity this is, and how conducive to the Prevention of much Sin and Misery, I need not spend much Time to prove: There are few that have liv'd any considerable Time in the World, and have seen more Parts of it than one, but have some Time or other, either tasted the *Comfort* of an *hospitable* Disposition or *smarted* for the *Want* of it; and such Men are the fittest to tell their Thoughts of either: That is, how inhumane 'tis to be without Bowels to an indigent Stranger, and how happy Mankind would be in every Place, were the Orders of the great Governour of the World duly observ'd in this Matter. And as for *wicked* Persons, who *deserve* the least Compassion of any, if they are in other Respects real Objects of Charity, their Wickedness must not put a Bar to it; for we are to imitate the Example of the merciful God, who is *kind and Beneficent to the unthankful and to the evil.*

But

But all this is to be underſtood with Reſpect only to the *really* neceſſitous and helpleſs, whoſe Wants and Calamities are not feign'd; and who are unable to help *themſelves* to better Circumſtances.

For there are a very vile Sort of People, who make a Trade of going about from Houſe to Houſe and with doleful Accents, and a forlorn Appearance and formal Complaints endeavour to melt People into Compaſſion towards them; who yet are far from being Objects of this Sort of Charity; their Neceſſities being *counterfeit*, or at leaſt they being very well able to ſupply them by their own Labour if they would. 'Tis well known how gainful they make this lazy Courſe of Life, how unwilling they are to *work* when any would employ them; how much abominable Debauchery there is in thoſe vagrant Societies; and how great a Peſt they are to the publick; they being no better than a Band of Villains and Robbers, and unprofitable idle Drones, that live upon the Labour and Spoil of others, and are no Way uſeful or ſerviceable themſelves: And therefore to *relieve* their pretended Neceſſities is to encourage the worſt Men living in a Courſe of Life highly diſhonourable to God, injurious to the State, and ruinous to their own Souls. Nay further, 'tis to deprive thoſe that *indeed* deſerve our Charity of conſiderable Supplies, which are, though *inſenſibly* beſtow'd upon thoſe vile Wretches; and were it computed what

what some Charitable Persons give in a Year in Mony to common Beggars at their Doors or otherwise, 'twould amount to Sum big enough to cheer the Hearts of many *Fatherless* and Widows, and decay'd House-keepers that are in greater *want* than those Vagrants, tho' not so whining and so affectedly nasty and ragged. And 'twould be worth while for a Person that has us'd hitherto to scatter his Charity among those *counterfeit* Objects of it, to try the Experiment what such Gifts would amount to in a Twelve Month's Time, by laying *aside* what he would otherwise have bestow'd that Way, whenever he is importun'd by such Wretches for an Alms; and then see whether he can't dispose of it to better purpose.

Indeed, *Labour* and *Correction* is the best Sort of Charity to such kind of Beggars. And would Men in Authority resolve to do their Duty in this Matter, and other Persons resolve to send such Vagabonds away empty, and with Reproof and Shame, the Case would soon be altered, and they would find it better to work than starve, and look upon honest Industry more eligible than the Lash. Much Wickedness would by this means be prevented, and it would be a double and treble Charity; 'twould provide for the Happiness of both Body and Soul of such as should be reformed by it from such a Hellish Course of Life; 'twould be a great Benefit to the publick, and Men would find themselves more able to support such as

are

are *really* oppreſs'd with Want, and utterly unable to help *themſelves*. And ſuch Behaviour as this to ſturdy Vagrants, however harſh and ſevere it may ſeem to ſome indiſcreetly compaſſionate Perſons, is plainly commanded by the great Apoſtle, 2 *Theſ.* 3. 10. *He that will not work, neither let him eat.* He that *Will* not work, that is, that appears to be able to labour but rather chuſes an idle wandring Life; and there is not One in Twenty of our common Beggars, but are of this Sort, hail and luſty and ſtrong, and in more Heart and better fed than many honeſt and *induſtrious* People: And they that can travel as they do around the Kingdom, we can't ſuppoſe, whatever they may pretend, to be incapable of Labour.

Indeed, ſometimes a *real* Object of Charity may preſent it ſelf at ones Door or Abroad, ſuch as the blind and aged and maimed, and the like, and theſe, no Queſtion, ought to be *reliev'd*; but there being ſo many *Counterfeits*, and the ill Conſequence of miſplacing ones Charity upon them being ſo very great; He is very *indiſcreet* in beſtowing his Alms that will not be firſt very well ſatisfied whether they are what they *pretend* to be, and deſerve his Charity or no.

But this Severity muſt be uſed with *Prudence*, and he that does deſerve *Correction* as a Vagrant, may yet by ſome calamitous accident in following his lew'd Trade, be at preſent in urgent

urgent Necessity of *Relief*; and here the Way is, first to supply the *Necessity*, and afterwards in due Time to superadd the *Correction*. For I must let no Man, how wicked soever, perish if I can prevent it? and as I am in Charity bound, by *Severity* when the Man is able to bear it, to provide for the Safety of his *Soul*, so by a timely Relief likewise when there is *urgent* Need of it to support his *Body*.

So that upon the Whole, all that want are to be reliev'd, but 'tis after a different manner, and the Charity must be adapted to the Necessity; to the Widow and the Fatherless, the Naked, the Hungry, the Sick and the Helpless must be ministred Comfort and Support; but to sturdy lazy Travellers (as they call themselves) the *Lash* and *Labour* and *rough* Treatment; and this, however harshly it may sound, is the greater Charity of the Two.

And thus much in *general* for the first Enquiry occasion'd by this Parable, *viz.* who are the proper Objects of this Kind of Charity, according to the Intent of our holy Religion, or in the words of the Lawyer to our Saviour, *who is our Neighbour* in this Respect? I proceed to the *Second* Enquiry, *How* we are oblig'd to *express* this Charity to the proper Objects of it, in what *Manner* and in what *Measure*? And in *general*, as to the *Manner* of relieving, it must be adapted to the *Necessity* to be reliev'd, and as to the *Measure*, it must likewise be suitable to the *Degree* of the *Necessity*, and to the *Ability* of

of the Perſon that relieves it. But, to do Juſtice to this Enquiry, we muſt be more *particular*, and ſhall therefore reduce the Neceſſities of the Objects of our Charity to theſe three Heads, *Poverty*, *Sickneſs*, and *Loſs of Liberty*, and ſhew the *Manner* and *Meaſure* of relieving each.

As for *Poverty*, it may be of ſeveral Kinds, and may conſiſt either in Want of Meat and Drink, or of Cloaths, or of a Habitation, or in a forlorn Widow-hood, and Loſs of Parents; *i. e.* in an urgent Want of Neceſſaries for Life, which the Perſons are utterly unable, at leaſt for the preſent, to ſupply themſelves withal, and ſuch a Loſs of Husband or Parent, as leaves deſtitute of ſuch Neceſſaries, and of Means to procure them.

Now in caſe of ſuch Poverty, the Relief muſt be ſuited to the *moſt urgent* Neceſſity; he that is hungry muſt be ſupplied with Meat, and the thirſty with Drink, the naked with Cloathing ſufficient to keep out the Injuries of the Weather, Strangers and diſtreſſed Travellers with Lodging, and Widows, and ſuch as have been Houſe-keepers but are fall'n to Decay, with convenient Habitations, and a competent Subſiſtence; and the Fatherleſs with good Education, and a Paternal Care in diſpoſing of them to Trades and Employments, whereby they ſhall be enabled to provide for themſelves. And if any ſhould be ſo deſtitute of all Comfort as to want moſt or all of theſe Neceſſaries, they muſt be ſupply'd with all,

beginning with that of which there is the most *need*; or else with a competent piece of *Mony*, which, as the wise Man says, *answers all things*. Eccles. 10. 19 But this *last* must be understood only with respect to a poor Man that is in such Circumstances, as that, he can, without any great Inconvenience, shift for himself; and with the Mony given him provide what is necessary: But when a Man is in such present urgent necessity, whether of Food, or Drink, or Rayment, or Lodging, or the like; that he will be in great Danger of perishing, if his Wants be not *quickly* supply'd, and the distance from publick places of Entertainment great, and the Season extreme; in these and the like Circumstances, 'twould be but a mock piece of Charity to give Mony and take no farther Care of him; there must be *particular* Provision made for such a Man's *particular* Wants, and that *immediately* and without Delays. Thus for Instance, suppose a poor Man should come to any one's House in a sharp Winter, and dark Night approaching, cold and faint, and hungry and weary, and beg for Admittance, and that Pity might be had of his sad Condition, and some Relief afforded him; and suppose the Master of the House should refuse to take him in, or let him refresh himself with him, but withal give him a Piece of Mony, and tell him that two or three Miles off there is a Town, where for that Mony he may have Supply of his Wants, and to send him away;

and

and ſuppoſe this poor Wretch ſhould either faint by the Way or miſs of it, and in the weak Condition he is in, be forced to lie abroad, and by the Morning be found quite overcome by the rigorous Seaſon, and ſtarv'd to Death: In this Caſe what will the Man's *dry* Charity avail him? Or rather, ſhall he not anſwer for the Death of that diſtreſs'd Creature, when he could have prevented it but would not?

The manner of the good Samaritan's relieving and ſuccouring the unfortunate Jew in the Parable, though by his different Way of Religion, quite eſtrang'd from the Jews is a remarkable Example of a *thorough* Charity. When he came near and ſaw what a ſad Condition the Thieves had left the poor Man in, deſpoil'd of his Mony and his Cloaths, and wounded and left half-dead; he firſt applies himſelf to the Relief of the greateſt Neceſſity, and binds up his Wounds, pouring in Oyl and Wine. And then, not thinking *that* a ſufficient Charity to a Man in his Condition, he ſet him on his own Beaſt, and brought him to an Inn, and took farther Care of his Refreſhment, and ſtay'd there with him till the morrow to ſee that he had what was convenient for him; and becauſe his perfect Recovery would be a thing of Time, he leaves Mony with the Hoſt, and a Charge to look well after him, and promiſes that whatever was ſpent more upon that poor Man's Account,

when he came again he would repay. This was indeed a *compleat* Relief, and manag'd with as much *Discretion* as *Compassion*, and our Lord's Application is, *Go and do thou likewise*. In all Cases of this Nature, the Circumstances of the poor must be consider'd, and the Relief suited accordingly.

2. As to the Manner of expressing our Charity to the *sick*, 'tis in short to make frequent Visits of Comfort to them, to refresh their *Spirits* by Pious Discourses of the Power and Goodness and Wisdom of that God who sends the Affliction, who can *remove* it if he thinks fit, and whose *chastning* is an Argument of his *Love*, and that if he still *continues* it, his Wisdom sees it will be for the *best at last*; that so they may be inclin'd to hope and trust in God, and patiently submit to his good Pleasure: And 'tis to supply likewise what is necessary for their Attendance and Recovery. The poorer sort should express their Charity in this Instance by *personal* Attendance and Service; and the more wealthy by providing things necessary, and overlooking and directing to what is convenient. And this is a most noble Piece of Charity, and provides for the Health of the *Soul* as well as the Body, and nothing can be more seasonable and *well-tim'd*. For in Time of Sickness the *whole Man* is dejected, and the Spirit which should bear up his Infirmity, is then it *self*, for the most part, *wounded*; through the near Prospect of the other

other World, and the bold Accuſations of Conſcience, which *then*, unleſs quite ſeard is loud and clamourous. Then the Man is leaſt of all able to help *himſelf*, and the Charge of Sickneſs is great; and he that was poor in *Health*, when *Sick* is doubly poor; and indeed there is no greater Object of Pity and Compaſſion than a poor ſick Man. And as *all* Charity muſt be univerſal without excepting even *Enemis*, ſo in *this* caſe, our Enemies ſhould be the Objects of our Charity to *chooſe*. For upon a ſick-Bed 'tis moſt likely that they *will* be reconcil'd, and 'tis highly neceſſary that then they *ſhould* be; for Sickneſs often ends in Death, and no Man can tell but *that* Sickneſs which his Enemy then lies under may be his *laſt*: And 'tis a miſerable thing to die in *Enmity*. And therefore, before it be too late, whoever is at variance with a ſick Man ſhould go to him and endeavour a Reconcilement; if he hath injur'd the *Sick* in any reſpect he ſhould ask his Pardon, and make him Satisfaction and Reſtitution; and if the ſick Man has injur'd *him*, he ſhould go to him to let him know that he freely forgives him, and deſires that all Ill-Will may be at an End for the future. And at that Time, when the Spirit is uſually more ſoftned and compliant than in Health, and the Soul more awaken'd and ſenſible of her Duty, 'tis very probable he will hearken, and the Man will gain his Brother. And 'tis a great Charity indeed to eaſe a

sick Man's Mind of the deviliſh and tormenting Paſſions of Malice and Revenge; it provides for Peace and Amity for the future ſhould he *recover*, and ſhould he *dye*, it makes his Account much eaſier at the Day of Judgment.

3. As for Charity to ſuch as are depriv'd of their *Liberty*, the *Manner* of it conſiſts in viſiting and diſcourſing comfortably to them, and in endeavouring by the beſt Methods we can to procure their Enlargement; and in the mean time, in helping them to Neceſſaries, and perſwading their Keepers to be kind to them, and uſe them tenderly. And if they are impriſon'd for *Crimes*, 'tis to endeavour to make them ſenſible of the Guilt of them before *God*, and that unleſs they ſincerely repent of them, an eternal Bondage in Chains of Darkneſs, and in the loweſt Hell, ſhall come in the place of the Dungeon, their Iron Shackles, and temporary Confinement. And the Objects of this piece of Charity are as before *all*, Enemies as well as Friends, Strangers and Foreigners, as well as Neighbours and Acquaintance.

Under this Head of the *Manner* of expreſſing our Charity to the Neceſſitous, it is proper to enquire what *Preference* may be made of one Object of Charity before another, if more ſhould offer themſelves than one Man can relieve, at leaſt at the *ſame* time? For our Direction in this matter, St. *Paul* has left us two general Rules, the one, *Gal.* 6. 10. where he ſays, *as we have Opportunity let us do good unto*

all

all Men; *but especially to those that are of the Houshold of Faith*, in which we are taught to prefer *Christians* before *Heathens* and *Infidels*, when there is no Help but *one* must be prefer'd, and among Christians, to prefer in like Circumstances the pious and sincerely good, before such as live not agreeably to their holy Profession, for such only as have the *Power* of Godliness, are properly of the Houshold of Faith. The other Rule is in 1 *Tim.* 5 8. in these Words, *If any provide not for his own, especially those of his own House*, or Kindred, *he has denyed the Faith*, &c. and here we are directed, if a Preference *must* be made, to make it in Favour of our *Friends* and *Relatives* before such as are *Strangers* to us.

But these Rules must be thus explained. As *first*, where 'tis *impossible* for us to comply with *all* Opportunities of doing good, there this Preference is to be made; but when we *can* we must do good to *all*. And *secondly*, When the Necessities of *pious* Christians, and our *Friends* and *Relations* are *equally great* and *urgent with* those of the impious and Strangers to us, there likewise our Charity should begin at *Home*: But *thirdly*, when the Distress of an *Ill* Man or a *Stranger* is *greater* and *more urgent* than that of a *good* Man or my Friend and Relative, so that the *former* will be in danger of perishing unless *immediately* reliev'd, and the *latter* will *not*, but may safely tarry longer: Then there must be no respect of Persons, but

the *greatest* Necessity, where-ever it be found must be *first* relieved.

I shall add but one thing more relating to the *Manner* of expressing our Charity, and that is what St. *Peter* advises, 1. *Pet.* 4. 9. that it be done without *grudging*. The Word in the Original is γογγυσμός, which signifies *murmuring* or *unwillingness* in doing any thing, as if 'twere torn and *forc'd* from one, rather than proceeded from a *free Inclination*. And this hateful churlish way of Alms-giving, St. *Paul* likewise expresly forbids, and says, our Charity must not be shewn *grudgingly, or as of Necessity*, 2 Cor. 9. 7. and *Rom.* 12. 8. *He that sheweth Mercy, let him do it with Chearfulness*; according to the Example which God himself hath set us, *Who giveth to every Man liberally, and upbraideth not.* James 1. 5.

And here, I can't but admire and adore the infinite Goodness of God; who has not only oblig'd us to the *Substance* of this Duty, but has so order'd the very *Circumstantials* of it; that the Necessitous may be relieved with as much *Decency* and *Ease* to themselves as can be, and the Alms of others look rather like their own *Propriety*, as the Payment of a Debt, or restoring of a Pledge, or bestowing a Reward; and that their *Souls* might not be griev'd by Frowns and Taunts, and unkind Language, when they receive Supply for the Needs of their *Body!* For Man as well as God loves a *chearful* Giver;

Giver; and a Benefit that comes *hardly*, and with ſhews of *Unwillingneſs*, is much *leſſened* in its Value; and a Man of a generous Spirit would prefer a *Mite* given with a *free* Heart and Words of *Kindneſs*, before the *Largeſs* of an *Emperour*, if he muſt ſuffer *Upbraidings* for it, and *opprobrious* Treatment. *Super Omnia, Vultus acceſsêre Boni*, ſays the Poet: All the Delicates at his Friends Entertainment would have reliſh'd but very indifferently, had not a *chearful Countenance* aſſur'd him of his *Welcome*. And if a *free* Charity be given in *ſecret* too, as our Lord himſelf directs, *Matth.* 6. 4. the poor Man will not be ſo much as put to the *Bluſh* for what he receives; and will come ſhort of the rich in nothing that is *neceſſary*, and be free from the *Vexations* that attend an opulent Condition; and the Advantage of the Wealthy over the Poor would then conſiſt chiefly in *this*, That they are by God's Providence enabled to be the *Supporters of the weak*; it being according to the Words of the *Lord Jeſus*, *more bleſſed to give than to receive*, Acts 20. 35. Eſpecially if we in the

Next Place, conſider the *Meaſure* of this Charity. And in general, it muſt be equal to the *Neceſſities* of the Poor, or at leaſt agreeable to every Man's *Ability*. A *great* Neceſſity muſt have a *great* Supply; as ſuppoſe a whole *Family* be in want, the Relief ought to be greater than to a *ſingle* Perſon: If a *Foreigner* is diſtreſs'd, and has not wherewithal

to

to carry him to his own Country, *he* should be more plentifully reliev'd than a Traveller that is in his Native Country, and has comparatively but a little Way to go. He that is a Prisoner or Captive for a *great* Debt or Ransom, should receive more liberally of our Charity than one that may be releas'd for *less*; the Necessities of a poor Man that is *sick* being doubly great, the Relief that is given him should bear Proportion, and be more liberal than ordinary: And the more dangerous and lasting, and consequently *chargeable* the Sickness is, the Charity should rise the higher still, and greater Care be had of him, and Visits oftner made to him. He that is *utterly* helpless and uncapable of working, ought to receive more largely of our Charity than one that is in some Measure able to help and provide for himself. In these and all other Cases of this Nature, he that has the greatest need must have the greatest *Supply*; and he that has the greatest *Ability*, his Charity must be answerable, and he must give *most*. But to prevent all unnecessary Scruples in this Matter, we should remember, that Charity does not consist in an *Indivisible* Point, *less* than which shall not be accepted; for a *Mite* given with a free Heart and good Intention by a poor Widow that could afford no more, was not only *accepted*, but the Charity highly *commended* by our Lord himself, and no doubt but was crown'd with a great Reward. The general

neral Rule in this Case is that of the Apostle, 1 *Pet.* 4. 11. *As every Man has receiv'd the Gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good Stewards of the manifold Grace of God.* That is, every Man's Charity must be proportionable to his Ability; he that has much must give plenteously, and he that has little must chearfully give of that little; and no Man that has any Share in this World's Good, must wholly shut up his Bowels of Compassion from his Brother that hath need. Remembring, *That he that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly, and he that soweth plenteously shall reap also plenteously,* 2 Cor. 9. 6. So that according to the Order of our good Creator, we see Riches are like our Blood, to *circulate*, and ought to be convey'd in due Proportions to every Part of the great Body of Mankind: The greater Channels are to supply the lesser, and the *fuller* they are the more they must *communicate*: And none must presume upon Pain of the worst of ill Consequences to *stop* this Course, or divert it to unprofitable Uses.

When our *own* Needs and those of our *Relatives*, are modestly and *reasonably* satisfied and provided for, all the rest God gives us to bestow upon the poor and needy, 'tis their Inheritance; and we shall be unjust in our Stewardship if we with-hold it from them. And, in the Words of the excellent Bishop *Taylor*, *Certainly there is not any greater Baseness, than to suffer a Man to perish or be in extreme*

treme want of that, *which God gave me* for *him, and beyond my own Needs.* And it must ever be remembred, That as Mens *Estates* increase, their *Charity* must in due Proportion increase likewise; it must not lye an useless Lump in a Chest, or be improv'd only to increase the Hoard, or minister to Luxury and Excess, or the Extravagancies of a prodigal Heir; but this Blessing of God must be distributed according to the Will of God, to sweeten and alleviate the Miseries of Mankind.

And now, would Men but act according to this their Duty, what abundant Supply would there be for the Necessities of every one? That of *Isaiah* 49. 9, 10. would then be *literally* fulfill'd, *Say to the Prisoners, Go forth to them that are in Darkness, shew your selves; they shall feed in the Ways, their Pastures shall be in all high Places. They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the Heat nor Sun smite them; for he that hath Mercy on them shall lead them, even by the Springs of Waters shall he guide them.* How many bitter Complaints, how many Sighs and Tears, how much Misery, and how much Sin would by such Charity be prevented? How many more might most Men relieve than they do? How very many might a Man of a large Estate take care of, and what vast numbers of Poor might have a very comfortable Subsistance, if *all* such Men would Conscientiously perform their Duty in this Matter? And with what *Ease* might this be done

done too? That which is every Day ſquander'd away to no Purpoſe, or conſum'd in Vice and Vanity, could it be computed, would amount to a prodigious Sum; and were but *ſo* much beſtow'd in *Charity* by every rich Man, as heedleſly and unaccountably ſlips from him, how many would enjoy a comfortable Maintenance, who now want Neceſſaries, and are ready to be ſtarv'd, and all the while the rich Man be not diſcernably the poorer for it? And if ſo *little* when rightly diſpos'd of would go ſo far in this bleſſed Work, what happy Effects ſhould we ſoon ſee, if Men of large Poſſeſſions would be perſwaded to obey their great Benefactor, and give *largely* of their Abundance! And in order to this they would do well to remember, that Riches are not properly and intirely Men's *own*, but *Talents* committed to them by God to improve, and lay out to his Glory. That 'tis he that is the great *Lord* and *Proprietor* of all, and *Men*, how opulent ſoever, no other than his *Stewards*; inrich'd on purpoſe that they may ſupply thoſe that have need, and take care that none in this great Family of the World periſh for want of what is needful for their Support: And that, of the *Diſcharge* of this their Stewardſhip, they muſt render an Account at the Day of Judgment, the general Audit of all Mankind; and then the faithful and good Stewards, that have fulfill'd their Lord's Command, and gave the poor of this great Family,

their

their Portion of Meat in due Season, shall be receiv'd into their Master's Joy: But the *unfaithful* and wicked Stewards, that were cruel and *hard-hearted* to their fellow-servants, and only feasted and pamper'd *themselves*, grew excessive and luxurious with their Lords Allowance, and *did eat and drink with the drunken*; their Lord will *come in a Day when they look not for him,* and *cut them asunder, and appoint them their Portion with Unbelievers, where shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth,* Luke 12.42.

And thus much may suffice to be spoken to the second Enquiry, *How* we are to *express* our Charity to the proper Objects of it, in what *Manner*, and in what *Measure*?

But before I proceed to what remains to be done according to the propos'd Method, I think it will not be amiss to enquire whether in the Expresses of our Charity to the *sick*, Danger of *Infection* will not excuse from visiting them?

To this I answer, *first* in *general*, that Danger of Infection will not excuse *all* from visiting the Sick: For 'twould be strangely *inhumane*, and contrary to this Christian Pity and Compassion which we are now discoursing of, to desert a poor helpless Creature in his *greatest Necessity*, only because there is a Probability of falling into the like Calamity: And would any Man be willing to be serv'd so himself? *Some* then ought, even in Case of *Contagion*, to visit and attend the Sick; but

who

who are they, for every one will be ready to ſhift it from himſelf ?

In the *firſt* place, I think the neareſt *Relations* of the Party ought to do it, for they have a *double* Tye upon them, that of *Nature* as well as of Religion ; and among theſe Relations, thoſe that are the moſt diſengag'd from *Buſineſs* and the Affairs of this World, and have therefore the leaſt Obligation to come into other Company where there may be Danger of ſpreading the Infection further ; and likewiſe ſuch as have the feweſt *Dependents* upon them : That is, *Private* and *ſingle* Perſons are oblig'd to this Duty before thoſe that are of more publick Callings, and have Families ; and among theſe, he that is *moſt* free and diſengag'd, and capable withal, is the *moſt* oblig'd. If there be no *Relations* of the infected Perſon (whether he be Poor or Rich, Friend or Enemy, Good or Bad, the Caſe is the ſame) or none that will venture upon ſuch hazardous Attendance ; I think the neareſt Neighbours are oblig'd to do it ; *i. e.* the *ſingle*, and diſengag'd from a Neceſſity of *publick Converſe* : For thoſe that have Wife and Children and Families, their Charity muſt begin at *home*, to take care of their *own* Relatives is the prime Obligation ; and the Safety of a whole Family is in moſt Caſes to be preferr'd to that of a ſingle Perſon. And thoſe whoſe neceſſary Employments call them into *much Company*, are bound to avoid what would endanger

endanger their bringing *Infection* to that Company, and that for the same Reason as before, because the Safety of *many* is generally to be preferr'd to that of *one:* And those upon whose Life depends, under God, the Maintenance and Support of divers Persons, for the sake of those Persons, should be very careful to preserve *themselves.* Only this ought to be observ'd by such as upon these and the like Accounts, cannot *personally* visit and attend the infected Person, *viz.* That they take great care to procure *others* that may do it; and according to their Ability, and the Wants of the Person, to send Supplies of all things necessary. And there are very many, who, though they will not venture their Lives for *Conscience* sake, and to gain the Reward of being merciful in the other World, yet for *Money* they will do it; and therefore such Encouragements must not be wanting from those that are of Ability.

As for *Physicians* and *Clergy-men*, whose Professions engage them to converse with great Numbers of People; how far they are oblig'd in this Matter, I think may be resolv'd thus:

If *only one* Person in a Parish or Neighbourhood, or but a *few* in comparison with the whole *Body* of Men, be *contagiously* sick; to me it seems, that neither Physician nor Divine are in such case oblig'd personally to visit them, but rather to *forbear*, and only to convey to them, by other Hands, what is needful for their Bodily and Ghostly Health re-

reſpectively. The Reaſon is, becauſe the Phyſicians and Divines being often ſent for to divers Families, muſt either *not* go after they have viſited an infected Perſon, and ſo neglect their Duty, and *many* ſuffer, and ſome periſh for want of their Aſſiſtance; or, if they *ſhould* go, would very probably endanger the whole Neighbourhood: And therefore, the Safety of *great Numbers* of People being to be preferr'd before that of *one* or but a *few*, they ought, I think, in this Caſe to keep at diſtance.

But when a Contagion ſpreads ſo that it becomes *epidemical*, and the *greater* Number of Perſons are ſeiz'd with it, then the Caſe is *alter'd*, and then I think both Phyſicians and Divines are bound to viſit *perſonally*. For in ſuch Caſe, to ſend Relief by *other* Hands, whether Medicines or ghoſtly Comfort and Advice; would, by reaſon of the Numbers of the Sick, become *impracticable*; and 'twould be unreaſonable for the ſake of a *few* that were well, to deprive a greater Number that are ſick of the great Benefit of perſonal Viſits of Phyſicians, which for many Reaſons prove more effectual than preſcribing at a *Diſtance*; and of the Comfort of the Prayers, and more cloſe and *particular* Diſcourſes of Divines, which no doubt are much more beneficial, and make a deeper Impreſſion upon the Soul, than *general* Advices and Exhortations ſent in Writing.

And *Divines* in this Caſe ſeem to be more oblig'd than *Phyſicians* (though the Obligation

is very strong upon Physicians too) and that because the Safety of the *Soul* is infinitely to be preferr'd before that of the *Body*, And if it perishes it perishes for *ever*, and will at length involve the Body too in the same eternal Ruin. And, for a Shepherd to *desert* his Flock in their *greatest Necessity*, to *leave* the Care of their Souls when there is the greatest Need of his *Help*, and the infernal Lyon roaring about seeking whom he may devour: This, I think, is the greatest *Barbarity*, and most base betraying that great Trust, that is possible.

The good Shepherd, says our Lord, *giveth his Life for his Sheep*: And *he*, the great Shepherd, and Bishop of our Souls, set the Example; *but the Hireling fleeth because he is a Hireling, and careth not for the Sheep, and the Wolf catcheth and scatters and devours them*, John 10. 12, 13. We should remember, that God is infinitely *powerful* and can protect, even from the noisom Pestilence, if he thinks fit; and nothing more intitles a Man to the peculiar Protection of the Almighty, than a faithful Discharge of his Duty. And, however it may fare with us *here*, there is a glorious Recompence reserved for so great a Charity in a *better* World

Proceed we now to the *third* and last thing to be done upon this Subject, which is to shew, what great *Encouragement* we have to this excellent Duty of Charity, or what a Blessedness it is to be able thus to *give*, rather than to *Receive*, and that both with Respect to *this* World and that to *come*. For,

For, in the firſt place, with Relation to this World, What can be a greater Pleaſure to a Generous Spirit, than to be the Happy Inſtrument of reſcuing others from *Miſery* and *Want*, from periſhing with *Hunger*, or by other Calamities, and reſtoring 'em to Life and Comfort, and Health and Liberty? What Delight more high and noble, than that which will ariſe from our changing the *Sighs*, and *Groans*, and *Laments* of the Miſerable, into *Rejoycings*, and the *Curſes* and horrid *Blaſphemies*, and impious Reflections upon Providence, utter'd by thoſe whom Extremity of Poverty has made deſperate; into *Praiſes* and *Bleſſing* of God, and Acknowledgments of his *Goodneſs* and Care of the Children of Men?

What can cauſe greater Complacency and Satisfaction in the Soul, than for a Man to be as a *Father* to the *Fatherleſs*, not only in *maintaining* them, but in providing for them good and pious *Education*, and honeſt Trades, whereby theſe very Children become Men of Probity, and *uſeful* to the State, who otherwiſe, if left at looſe and unregarded, would in all Probability have been the Peſts and Diſturbers of the Community: Miſerable themſelves, and the Occaſion of much Miſery to others? And what more grateful to a pious Man, than to relieve the forlorn Poverty of ſuch as are at once depriv'd of their Husbands, and the means of providing for their Families, and to be bleſſed by thoſe that were ready to periſh,

and *cause the Widows Heart to sing for Joy?* Job 29. 31. This is *pure* and *undefil'd Religion*, says St. *James*, *to visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction*; Jam. 1. 27. nay, 'tis a near Resemblance of the Charity of *God himself*, who *preserveth the Strangers, and relieveth the Fatherless and Widow.* Psal. 146. 9.

And indeed, every Expression of Mercy and Compassion resembles us to *God*, whose *Mercy is above all his Works*; and to the Compassionate Jesus, who so pitied the miserable Estate of Mankind, as to leave his Father's Glories, and take on him the Form of a Servant, and suffer in our stead, that we might be Partakers of Life and Pardon, and Immortal Happiness, and *who went about doing Good* all the Days of his Humiliation. And certainly, to be like God, and the great Redeemer of the World, Christ Jesus, and that in the most Amiable and Glorious Perfection, must needs fill a Man's Breast with *Heavenly* Joy, since the Happiness of that blessed place consists in the Souls being *transform'd* into the Divine *Image and Likeness from Glory to Glory*, 1 John 3. 2. 2 Cor. 3. 18.

But Secondly, (and which, with some may be the most prevailing Argument) there is great Encouragement to Charity, with Relation to *this* World, because 'tis the most *thriving* of all Christian Graces, and is always attended with *Prosperity*, and a Blessing.

David says expressly, *Psal.* 37. 25. *I have*

been

been Young, and now am Old, and yet saw never the Righteous forsaken, nor his Seed begging their Bread, i. e. as it follows in the next Verse, the Righteous Man that is *ever merciful and lendeth*: And not only *himself*, but his *Posterity* is blessed. And this, a learned Author of our own, *Extends to all Ages, and challenges any Historian of Past, or Observator of present Times to give one Instance of any Christian Alms Giver, that ever brought himself or his Posterity to* Want, *nay, that did not* thrive *and prosper the better by that means.* And this is confirm'd by *Solomon*, Prov. 11. 24, 25. *There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that with-holdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to Poverty: The Liberal Soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be water'd also himself.* That is, as the same Author has it, *unless by Negligence or Suretiship, or some other* Sin *that he lives in, he brings a Curse and Poverty upon himself, and Mercifulness prove not Antidote sufficient against all other Poison.*

Dr. *Hammond*, Pract. Cat. Lib. 3. Sect. 1.

And he that is thus assur'd of the peculiar Care of God concerning him, and that he shall always have a comfortable Provision as long as he lives, in Recompence of his liberal Charity to the Poor and Needy; has questionless very great Encouragement to perform the Duty. And as for the unavoidable Troubles of this Life which will mix with the most perfect Prosperity *here*, as Sickness, Vexation and Dis-

appointments, and Temporal Losses, and such like; *The Lord will deliver him that considereth the Poor*, says *David, in the Time of Trouble, and strengthen him upon the Bed of Languishing, and make all his Bed in his Sickness.* Ps. 41. 1, 3. And though many may be the Troubles, even of the thus Righteous, which God may permit them to be exercis'd with for many excellent purposes, *yet he will surely deliver them out of all.*

As for the Encouragement to this Charity, with Respect to the *next* World, it is thus expres's'd by our Saviour, *Mat.* 5. 7. *Blessed are the Merciful for they shall obtain Mercy*; that is, at the Time when every Man will stand in the greatest Need of Mercy, the Day of Judgment. For then there will be particular Enquiry made into the Discharge of every one's Stewardship, in Point of Mercy and Compassion to the Indigent and Calamitous; and the great Judge of all the World, has declar'd, that when he shall come in the Clouds of Heaven, to render to every Man according to his Works; he will esteem the Expresses of our Charity to his necessitous Servants as done to himself, and will reward the Merciful, not only with a *publick Commendation*, at that General Assembly of all the World, but will receive them to a Participation of the Glories and Felicities of his Eternal Kingdom: Saying, *Come ye blessed Children of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepar'd for you from the Beginning of the World*, Mat. 25. 34. And surely no Man can want Encouragement

to

to the Duty when it ſhall be rewarded in ſuch a Manner as this.

I ſhall now infer ſome few things from the whole, and ſo conclude this Argument. And firſt, from the ſtrict Charge that God has given, in the Revelations of his Will, to every capable Perſon, to ſupply the Neceſſities of *all* that want Relief, and that according to the *Wants* of the Needy, and in a Meaſure ſuitable to his *Ability*, and inforced this Charge with the moſt prevailing Motives that can be made uſe of: From hence I infer the great *Unreaſonableneſs*, as well as *Impiety*, of charging *God* with the Miſeries of Mankind in this inſtance.

For, what would they have God do more in this Matter than he has already done? Would they have him exerciſe his Omnipotence in *wholly preventing* Poverty? That is would they have him interpoſe in all the Contingencies of this Mortal Life, and immediately *command* the *Sea*, for Example, to be *calm*, when a Veſſel is in Danger, whoſe Wreck would be the *undoing* of ſeveral; or ſend an Angel to ſteer her from Shelves and Quickſands, to preſerve her from Pirates, and conduct her in Safety to the Haven? Would they have the *Land* miraculouſly ſecur'd from all Misfortunes too, from the Villanies of Men, from Caſual *Fires*, from *Inundations* and *Earthquakes*; and would they have Men *forcibly* with-held from being guilty of ſuch *Vices* as ruin Thouſands, ſuch as Pride and Luxury, and Wantonneſs and Exceſs?

Or if (as well they may) they think *this* too unreasonable to be desir'd, would they have God, when Men are thus *reduc'd to Poverty*, immediately work *Miracles* for their *Relief*? Would they have *Ravens* bring Food to the Hungry as they did to *Elijah*, 1 Kings. 17. 6. or would they have *every* Poor Widows Cruise of Oyl, and Barrel of Meal be as lasting as the Widow's of *Sarepta* was, *ver* 16. or would they have Water spring from *Rocks*, and be immediately turn'd into *Wine*, to chear and refresh such as are parch'd with Thirst? Would they have our *Lord* come down a *second* time from *Heaven*, to heal *Diseases*, or an *Angel* always set open the *Prison* Doors when good Men are confined and macerated, or the like?

That such extraordinary things have been *sometimes* done, is sufficient to evince, that God is not an *idle Spectator* of Humane Affairs; but to expect it should be *always* so, is foolishly presumptuous.

But, it may be, those that are asham'd of *this* would yet, by all means, have God take a *severer* Course with his unfaithful Stewards than he does; and at least *displace* them, and *give their Riches to others, that Men might see and fear, and do no more wickedly.* Thus *Man will be replying against God, and the Clay saying to the Potter, Why hast thou made me thus?*

But, I would fain know, whether these Counsellours of the All-wise God, would have *all* that are unfaithful in their Stewardship,

ſhip, us'd in this Manner, or only *ſome* for a Terrour to the reſt? If *all* the World would quickly be in *Confuſion*, by ſuch frequent Changes in States and Governments, and Private Families, as would then be made; if *ſome* only, *in Terrorem*, and to affright the reſt into a more Conſcientious Diſcharge of their Duty, why that is *often* done; nothing is more common than the Riſe and Fall of Men and Families, and ſometimes their Decay is made very remarkable by ſome *extraordinary* Accidents. Which, if Men would obſerve it, is warning enough to them to be faithful in their Stewardſhip: but if they will be thoughtleſs and regard it *not*, the Blame ought to be *their*'s, not *God*'s, and their's will be the *Puniſhment* too at the long Run, when he ſhall call every Man before him to make up his Accounts.

Wherefore, let no Man any more, for the future, paſs Impious and Raſh Cenſures upon the *All-wiſe* and *Good* Governour of the Univerſe, becauſe his *Servants* neglect their Duty in this Matter; but rather, humbly and earneſtly intreat him to incline their Hearts to a better Obſervance of his Holy and Juſt, and Merciful Commands: And if the Poor ſhall ſtill go unpitied and unreliev'd, let us commit their Cauſe unto *him*, who, if with Patience they perſevere in well-doing, will at length abundantly recompence their Sufferings *here*, with Glory, Honour and Immortality in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Secondly,

Secondly, From what has been said, I infer, the great Baseness and *Ingratitude* of those who thus wickedly betray their Trust, and thereby bring such Odious *Aspersions* upon their great *Benefactor*, and so much *Sin* and *Misery* upon Mankind.

Good God! That ever Men should be so low sunk, so vilely brutish and degenerate, as to prefer a Shining Coach and Gay Livery's, and Vanity and profuse Folly in many other Instances, before the Honour of their God, and the Comfort and Relief of a Poor Afflicted Christian! That they should be contented to hear the Groans of the Distressed, and the Blasphemies of Atheists, against that God who gave them all they have; rather than by *retrenching* any thing from their *Excessive* Way of Living, to silence either! 'Tis a Monstrous *Complicated* Impiety this, and will at last pull down a Heavy Vengeance.

Wherefore, from the whole, I infer, in the last place, how highly it concerns us all to imitate the Example of the *discreetly* and *thoroughly* charitable *Samaritan* in the Parable, and be more careful of this our Duty for the future. For if we prove *ill* Stewards of the Talents God has committed to our Trust for the Relief of the Calamities of our Brethren, we shall not only have the Sins of *Unfaithfulness* and base *Ingratitude* to answer for; but the Prophane Flouts and Cavils of the Atheistical, the Curses and Imprecations of the desperately Mise-

Miſerable, the Thefts and Murders, and other Villanies of ſuch, whoſe *Unrelieved* Poverty forced to be thus wicked; and the Blood of ſuch as *dy'd* for want of Succour: *All this* will be charg'd upon us, and overwhelm us with Eternal Horrour and Confuſion.

Wherefore, to conclude; *while we have Time, let us do good unto all Men, but eſpecially to thoſe of the Houſhold of Faith*; let us *make Friends with the Mammon of Unrighteouſneſs*, that when all *this* World's Good ſhall *fail* us, *we may be receiv'd into Everlaſting Habitations.* Let us *lay up for our ſelves a good Foundation againſt the Time to come*, and be Faithful Stewards of *the manifold Grace of God* committed to us; leſt our great Lord ſhould come in a Time when we think not of him, and place us on the Left Hand, and paſs this Diſmal and Irreverſible Sentence upon us; *Depart from me ye curſed into everlaſting Fire, prepard for the Devil and his Angels. For I was Hungry and ye gave me no Meat, Thirſty and ye gave me no Drink, a Stranger and ye took me not in, Naked and ye cloathed me not, Sick and in Priſon, and ye viſited me not.*

From which terrible Condemnation, and that hardned Diſpoſition that deſerves it, and will inevitably bring it down upon us if not ſpeedily amended, the Merciful and Good Lord deliver us all, for the Sake of his Compaſſion in Jeſus Chriſt our Saviour. Amen. Amen.

The

The PRAYER.

O Most Compassionate Jesus! Thou great Pattern of Charity, who in the Days of thy Flesh wentest about doing Good to Mankind, relieving the Necessities both of Body and Soul, and hast commanded thy Disciples to go and do likewise; give me the Grace, I beseech thee, according to my Ability, to be charitable to all that are really Necessitous, without excepting any, but always to guide these good Works with Discretion: Lest by my ill-plac'd Alms, I encourage Debauchery and Sloth, and have the less to give to those that truly want. And since the Poverty and Sickness of the Soul is of all the most dangerous and deplorable, O that I may be so happy, as by Fraternal Correption, and Seasonable wholsome Counsel and Advice, according to my Opportunities and Capacity, to relieve the Spiritual Necessities of my Brethren, and convert a Sinner from the Errour of his Way, and save a Soul from Death! And may I always chearfully *perform this Godlike Duty, and take Delight in the Blessed Work of chearing the Hearts of the Distressed, and making light the Burthens of the Afflicted, and thereby vindicating thy Providence from the Vile Aspersions of Wicked Men, and occasioning much Thanksgiving unto God. O may I never forget that I am the Steward only of that Portion of this World's Good, with which thou hast intrusted me, for the Good of thy great Family:*

Family: And that thou wilt one Day call me to give an Account of the Diſcharge of this my Stewardſhip, particularly enquire into my Acts of Charity, and infinitely reward me if I be found Faithful in this Truſt, and for ever puniſh me with the Devil and his Angels if I be not. And that I may abound the more in this excellent Grace, Aſſiſt me effectually and immediately to cut off all Exceſſes and vain Superfluities of Life, and never let me be ſo forſaken of all Piety and Humanity, as to ſuffer my poor Fellow-Servants to want Neceſſaries, rather than retrench my vile Extravagancies! And may this moſt excellent and royal Law of thine be always preſent with me as my Rule, to do to others as I would be done by in like Circumſtance; and in all the Expreſſes of my Charity, let thy Glory, and the Good of my Brethren and the Publick, be my ſole End; and remove far from me all Pride and Vain-Glory, for thy Mercies Sake. This and whatever elſe is neceſſary to the Perfection of this great Duty, grant me, I beſeech thee, O moſt Compaſſionate Saviour Jeſus. Amen.

PARABLE

PARABLE VIII.

Of the Talents.

Matth. xxv. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30.

The Kingdom of Heaven is as a Man traveling into a far Country, who called his own Servants, and deliver'd unto them his Goods.

And unto one he gave five Talents, to another two, and to another one; to every Man according to his several Ability, and straightway took his Journey.

Then he that had received the five Talents went and traded with them, and made them other five Talents.

And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

But he that had received one, went and digged in the Earth, and hid his Lords Money.

After a long time, the Lord of these Servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

And

And ſo he that had received five Talents came and brought other five Talents, ſaying, Lord, thou deliver'dſt unto me five Talents; behold, I have gain'd beſides them five Talents more.

His Lord ſaid unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful Servant, thou haſt been faithful over a few things, I will make thee Ruler over many things: enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord.

He alſo that had receiv'd two Talents came and ſaid, Lord, thou deliver'dſt unto me two Talents; behold, I have gained two other Talents beſides them.

His Lord ſaid unto him, Well done, good and faithful Servant, thou haſt been, &c.

Then he which had received the one Talent came and ſaid, Lord, I know thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou haſt not ſown, and gathering where thou haſt not ſtrew'd.

And I was afraid, and went and hid thy Talent in the Earth; lo, there thou haſt that is thine.

His Lord anſwer'd, and ſaid unto him, thou wicked and ſlothful Servant, thou knoweſt that I reap where I did not ſow, and gather where I have not ſtrewed:

Thou oughteſt therefore to have put my Money to the Exchangers, and then at my coming I ſhould have received mine own with Uſury.

Take therefore the Talent from him, and give it unto him that hath ten Talents.

For

For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

And cast ye the unprofitable Servant into outer Darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth.

THE *Interpretation* of this Parable may be this. By *a Man travelling into a far Country*, is represented our Saviour's leaving this World, and ascending into Heaven after he had finish'd the great Work of our Redemption; and by his *calling to him his own Servants, and delivering to them his Goods*, is signified his enabling his Disciples with sufficient *Grace* and the Assistance of his *Holy Spirit*, to perform that Duty and Service which he requires of them in his Absence.

By his giving to one *Five* Talents, to another *Two*, and to a third but *One*, according to their several Abilities, is expressed, that God affords his *Grace* according to Mens *natural* Capacity of serving him, (for there is a previous Ability first supposed, and suitable to *that* is the number of Talents that are given) and to *the Kind and Degree* of *Service* that he thereupon expects from them. He that by the previous Gift of God in his *natural* Endowments, is capable of doing him great Service, and of being an excellent *Example* to others; and is therefore by the Providence

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of God deſign'd for, or actually plac'd in an *eminent Station*, and employ'd in a Service of great Weight and *Difficulty*; to him is given *greater* Aid from Above, becauſe he is more capable of *improving* what he receives to God's *Glory* and the Good of the *Church*; and has likewiſe greater *Need* of the Divine Aſſiſtance, by reaſon of the *Difficulty* of the Duty he is to perform. And he that *naturally* is *not* ſo capable, receives proportionably *leſs* Aid from Heaven; but yet ſuch as is ſufficient to enable him to diſcharge *that Duty* which, according to his *natural Capacity*, is requir'd of him.

By *His Trading* that had received *Five* Talents, and gaining *other Five*, and his gaining *other Two* that had *received* but *Two*; is ſhewn that according to the *Meaſure* of Grace and *ſupernatural* Aſſiſtance that Men have received, ſo ſhould their *Improvement* be, and that *faithful* Chriſtians will be careful to *make* ſuch Improvement: And by *His* hiding his Talent in the Ground that had but *One*, is repreſented the inexcuſable *Sloth* and Idleneſs of wicked Men, who will not take ſo much Pains as to improve, tho' but *One* Talent, in order to their Salvation.

By the Lord of thoſe Servants *coming after a long time and reckoning with them*, is repreſented the Coming of Chriſt to *Judgment* at the *End of the World*, then to enquire into every Man's Works, and Reward or Puniſh as there is juſt Occaſion.

By His receiving the *Diligent* into his *Joy*, is expreſs'd the Reward of the Righteous in the Bliſsful Kingdom of Heaven; and by the *Slothful* and *Wicked* Servant, (who was therefore *Wicked* becauſe *Slothful*) by his bringing his *One* Talent to his Lord *unimprov'd*, and excuſing his Unprofitableneſs by ſaying, that he *knew him to be a hard Man*, unreaſonably *griping*, expecting to *reap where he had not ſown*, and the like; and that therefore he brought him his own again as he gave it him, fearing to employ it, leſt he ſhould have loſt it, and yet been oblig'd to make it good to his Lord: By this is repreſented the *Baſe* Thoughts too many have of *God* and *Religion*, as if it were impoſſible to bear his Yoke, and keep his Commands, he exacting ſuch *unreaſonable* Services from us; but this is only to excuſe *one* Wickedneſs by *another*, and ſhews what wretched Shifts Ill Men are put to, to palliate their great Neglect of their Duty to their Maſter; as appears by his Lord anſwering and ſaying, *Thou wicked and ſlothful Servant, thou kneweſt that I reap where I ſowed not, thou oughteſt therefore to have put my Money to the Exchangers, that at my coming I might have receiv'd my own with Uſury.* By which is repreſented the Neceſſity of Mens improving their Talent for *that very Reaſon* (were it true) which they are apt to plead in *Excuſe* for their ſlothful Negligence. For to him that looks upon God as ſo *auſtere* a Being, there

there is more than ordinary Obligation to *improve* what he has committed to his Truſt for that Purpoſe: And becauſe a Man eſteems God as an *hard* and *ſevere* Maſter, therefore to be idle and negligent in his Service, is a very *prepoſterous* Courſe, and looks as if he had a mind to provoke his Anger againſt him.

But indeed, *This* is the *Truth*: God is ſo very far from being an *unreaſonably ſevere Maſter*, that He is *a moſt indulgent Parent*, and commands nothing but what is very practicable, and highly conducive to the Good and *Happineſs* of his Creatures; which ſhould create a *Filial Love* and Reverence in us towards him, rather than a *ſlaviſh Dread*: But however, he is not ſo *unreaſonably fond* neither, as to paſs by the Provocations of obſtinate *irreclaimable* Rebels, and clear thoſe that are *Impenitent* as well as *Guilty*, that have heinouſly *offended* him, and yet take no care to *amend* and recover his Favour. Though *he does not reap where he did not ſow, nor gather where he did not ſtrew*, yet he expects a due Improvement of what he commits to our Charge, and is ready likewiſe proportionably to reward our *Induſtry*. And this is apt indeed to *quicken* and *encourage* us in our Duty, but by no means to *ſcare* and affright us *from* it: For nothing can be more *reaſonable*, than for God to expect we ſhould *improve* what he beſtows upon us for *that very end*, and that we ſhould obey thoſe Commands of His

which are so highly *reasonable* in themselves; and which he likewise *assists* us to *perform*. Let no Man therefore say, God is an unreasonably *rigid Master*, and his Commands *intolerable Burdens*; for 'tis abominably *false* (as will appear more fully in the Sequel:) But were it *true*, it would be no Excuse for Sloth and *Idleness* in his Service, much less for wholly *deserting* it; but rather, an Argument for *double* Care and Diligence in it.

By the Lord of that Slothful Servant commanding his *One* unimprov'd Talent to be taken from him, and given to him who by his Industry had improv'd his *Five* Talents to *Ten*; is represented God's *depriving* those of his *Grace* and the Assistances of his Holy Spirit, who so much neglect it, and make no use of it to the great *Ends* for which it was given them. (viz.) *His Glory* and *Their own Happiness*; and making still greater *Additions* of his Grace to such as have well improv'd their former Stock. And by his commanding the *Unprofitable* Servant to be cast into *Outer Darkness*, where shall be *weeping and gnashing of Teeth*; is express'd their Deplorable Condition in the Regions of Eternal Misery and Despair, who make no Improvement of the Talents committed to them; the *Deprivation of Grace* in *this* World, being a certain Forerunner of *Perdition* in the *other*. It nearly concerns therefore, every Man carefully to *improve* the Talent committed to him; because

cauſe *unto every one that hath ſhall be given, and he ſhall have Abundance, but from him that hath not, ſhall be taken away, even that which he hath.*

This Parable, thus interpreted affords us theſe *Six* Heads of Diſcourſe.

Firſt, That Gods gives *ſufficient Grace* to every *ſenſible Chriſtian* wherewith to *work out his Salvation.*

Secondly, That God expects from every Man, that he ſhould *improve* what Grace he has receiv'd, and that proportionably to the *Meaſure* in which it was given him, and make uſe of it to the *Ends* for which it was given.

Thirdly, That there will be a Time, when our Lord will come to take *Account* of Men's Improvement of the Grace that was given them, and reward every Man according to his *Deſerts.*

Fourthly, That there ſhall be *Degrees* of Men's *Happineſs* or Miſery in the other World, according to the *Degrees* of their *Improvement* or Negligence and Careleſsneſs in *this.*

Fifthly, That 'tis abominably *Falſe* and *Impious* to charge God, as being unreaſonably *rigid* and ſevere in *taking* this *Account* of Men's *Improvement*, and expecting to find a *Good Uſe* made of what he committed to their *Truſt.* And,

Laſtly, That the Condition of the *Diligent* will be unſpeakably *happy*, and that of the *Unprofitable* unſpeakably *miſerable*; and that both in *this* World and the *next.*

First, God gives *sufficient Grace* to every *sensible Christian*, wherewith to *work out his Salvation*. I say to every *sensible Christian*, because I would confine my Discourse to the State of such as are *Christians*; and such of *them* as have the *Use* of their *Senses* and their *Reason*: For as those that are *out of the Pale of Christ's Church*, though Charity will incline us to hope well of them, and that God's Mercy will extend even to *Heathens* that never yet *heard* of the *Gospel of Christ*, and his Spirit assist them to live according to that *Natural* Law written in the Heart of every Man; yet we can *determine* nothing in this Case with Relation to them, and have nothing else to do, but to leave them to the *Infinite Mercy* of God, and *pray* for their *Conversion*. And as for such as have been receiv'd into the *Fold of Christ*, and have afterwards prov'd *Idiots*, and without the Use of their *Reason*, their Case is likewise wholly in the *Dark* to us; and though we need not question, but God's Infinite Goodness will incline him to *pity* their Deplorable Condition, yet which *Way* he will express his Mercy to them we must not presume to say. *Hidden* things belong to *God*; the *revealed* are for *us and our Children*: Among which I take this to be *one*, That *God gives sufficient Grace to every sensible Christian, wherewith to work out his Salvation.*

And here not to enter into the *Endless* and most *Abstruse* Dispute about *Predestination* (which

(which the leſs Men trouble their Heads about, the better 'tis for 'em in all Reſpects) I ſhall only urge two or three *plain Places of Scripture* to confirm this Poſition, and add to 'em *one as plain Reaſon.*

The Places of *Scripture* are firſt, that in 2 *Pet.* 3. 9. where the Apoſtle ſays, that *God is not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to Repentance*; to which is agreeable that of St. *Paul* to *Timothy*, 1 Epiſt. 2. 4. *God will have*, or deſires, that *all Men ſhould be ſav'd, and come to the Knowledge of the Truth*; Now, the next Scripture I will quote, which is 2 *Cor.* 3. 5. tells us, That *we are not ſufficient of our ſelves, to think any thing as of our ſelves, but our Sufficiency is of God*; and *Phil.* 2. 13. *'tis God that worketh in us, to will and to do of his good Pleaſure*; and accordingly, ſays *John the Baptiſt*, ſpeaking of our Lord, *of his Fulneſs have we all receiv'd, and Grace for Grace*, *John* 1. 16. and *Epheſ.* 4. 7. *To every one of us is given Grace according to the Meaſure of the gift of Chriſt.* Which Scriptures put together make this Argument.

God is deſirous of the Happineſs and Salvation of *every* Man; but, without his *Aſſiſtance*, and the Aids of his *Grace*, and Holy Spirit, *no* Man can *arrive* at that Happineſs: 2 *Pet.* 3. 9. 1 *Tim.* 2. 4. 2 *Cor.* 3. 5. *Phil.* 2. 13.

Therefore, he gives *ſufficient Grace* and Aſſiſtance to *every Man*, wherewith, if he be not *Idle* and Wanting to himſelf, he *may work*

out his Salvation. John. 1. 16. Ephes. 4. 7. For, we can't but allow, that what God *desires* for *every Man*, and which *no Man*, can *attain* without his *Aid* and *Assistance*, he will give *every Man* sufficient *Assistance* with his own Industrious Concurrence to *compass*. Otherwise, he would *desire* that for *some*, *i. e.* those to whom he should deny his Divine Assistance, which he knows 'tis impossible for them to attain to; which I think can't be consistent with his Infinite *Wisdom*. Supposing that desire of his to be sincere and in earnest, and if it is not where is his Truth and Goodness?

This seems to me to be sufficient *Scripture* Proof for this Position. And to this I shall add this one *Plain Reason*.

Namely, That since the *Commands* of Religion, in order to the attaining the *Rewards* of it, are given in *General* to *every Man*, and there is no *Exception* made, but *every one that names the Name of Christ must depart from all Iniquity*; therefore, *every Man* must be supposed *able* to keep and *observe* those Commands, unless we will be so Blasphemous as to say with the Unprofitable Servant in the Parable, that God is so *unreasonable* as to *reap where he did not sow*, to command *Impossibilities*; and then so *unjust* and *cruel*, as to punish Men Eternally for *not obeying* them. But now, that no Man is of *himself* able to keep the Commandments, is evident from the whole Tenor

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of Scripture, and from the ſad Experience of even the *Beſt* of Men; and conſequently, this Ability muſt be allow'd to proceed from the Aid of ſome *other*, namely, from him who is the *only Giver of every good and perfect Gift, and who giveth to every Man liberally, and upbraideth not.* Indeed, he giveth to every Man *ſeverally as he pleaſes*, to ſome *more*, to ſome *leſs*, to ſome *five* Talents, to ſome *two*, and to others but *one*; according to Men's Ability to improve them, and as in his infinite Wiſdom he ſees moſt conducive to his *own Glory*, and the *Edification* of the *Church*, but he is wholly *wanting* in this Divine Gift to no Man that is capable of improving it, but beſtows upon every ſenſible Chriſtian, *Grace ſufficient*, wherewith if he makes *good Uſe* of it, *to work out his Salvation*

And this ſhould have this four-fold good Effect upon us. It ſhould make us unfeignedly *thankful* to the Infinite Goodneſs of God, for this his unſpeakable Gift; looking upon the *Grace* he hath beſtow'd on us, as an Earneſt of our Salvation. It ſhould put us upon begging devoutly and earneſtly and frequently at the Throne of Grace, for ſtill *greater* Degrees of this *Heavenly Aid*, in order to his *greater Glory*, and our more *perfect Happineſs*; remembring that this is of all the greateſt Treaſure; and what a *Frail* Sinful Creature, ſhould above all things hunger and thirſt after. For tho' every man at firſt, receives as much Grace as he

he is able to improve; yet he that has improv'd what he at first receiv'd, is by that his Diligence grown capable of more, and able to make a suitable Improvement: As he in the Parable, that had improv'd his Five Talents to Ten, was capable of Receiving and Improving still *more*; and accordingly had *his* Talent given to him who buried it in the Ground, and brought it without any Improvement to his Lord. Five Talents was at first proportionable to his Ability, but by duely improving them, his Ability was much enlarg'd, and he became capable of, and received more. And to God should all the *Praise* be given, of all the good Things we perform by means of this his Divine Assistance; reflecting upon the Words of St *Paul*, 1 Cor. 4. 7. *Who maketh thee to differ, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?* And finally, because to *all of us* is given *Grace sufficient* to our Happiness; therefore *to work out* our Salvation with it in *fear* and *trembling*, lest by our Negligence and Sloth we *fail* of this Grace of God, and it be withdrawn and taken from us.

For in the *second* Place, God expects that every Man should *improve* the *Grace* he hath receiv'd, and that proportionably to the *measure* in which he has receiv'd it, and make use of it to the *Ends* for which it was bestow'd upon him.

For thus we see in the Parable, how *angry* the Lord was when his Servant brought him the

the Talent he committed to him, *un-improv'd*; he calls him *ſlothful and wicked Servant*, and deprives him of his Talent, and gives it for an Encouragement, to him that had made the the *greateſt Improvement*, and ſentences the Unprofitable Servant to *outer Darkneſs, where is weeping and gnaſhing of Teeth.* And agreeably ſays St. *Paul*, 1 *Cor.* 12. 7. *The manifeſtation of the Spirit is given to every one to profit withal.* Chriſtianity is not an idle lazy Profeſſion, does not conſiſt in fine Words and ſpecious Pretences, but in an active lively Piety, ſuitable to every Man's ſeveral Ability. He that has received *much Grace* muſt be eminent for *much Holineſs*; his Piety muſt ariſe proportionably to the Communications of the Holy Spirit which he enjoys, and his *Diligence* be commenſurate to his *Strength*. He that has received *five Talents*, muſt gain *other five* with them; and he that has receiv'd *two, other two*; and no Man muſt be without *ſome* Increaſe, tho' he has receiv'd but *One*.

The *End* for which God beſtows his Grace upon us, is *threefold*. (1.) For the *Advancement* of his *own Glory*; (2.) For the Good and *Edification* of the *Church*; (3.) For our *own* Happineſs and *Salvation*. And therefore, the more Grace and Aſſiſtances from Above a Man has receiv'd, the more ſhould he endeavour to *glorifie God* with it, to *edifie* the *Church*, and by a holy Life, to ſecure his *own Salvation*. And he that either makes *no* uſe of

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the Grace that God hath given him, like him in the Parable, who instead of *trading* with his Talent, hid it in the Earth; or else *abuses* it to *vile* and *wicked* Purposes; is a *wicked* and *unprofitable* Servant, and shall be cast into *outer Darkness*.

To know *when* a Man has receiv'd *plenty* of this Divine *Grace*, and to what *Improvement* he is consequently oblig'd; is, for him in the first place to reflect upon his *Natural* Parts and Abilities, upon his Capacity of *understanding* and considering the great *Truths of Religion*; and then, what *Instruction* he hath met with in the School of Righteousness, what plenty of Religious Discourses and Exhortations he has enjoy'd; and how frequently he has felt Motions from *within* to a still more and more holy and exemplary Life: He that hath experienc'd all this in a *great* degree, that hath had this pregnant *Natural* Capacity well cultivated by an early and excellent *Instruction*, and had the whole of Religion plainly laid before him in all the *Doctrines*, *Duties*, *Rewards* and *Punishments* of it; and been often and affectionately exhorted to live accordingly in all Holy Conversation and Godliness, and has frequently felt secret *internal* Motions and Perswasions to it; this Man has received much more than *One* Talent at the hands of God, and God will expect from him a *proportionable Improvement*; and he must *abound* in every good Word and Work:

Work: *For unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required; and to whom Men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* But becauſe all Men are not of equal Abilities *naturally*, neither have the *ſame* Opportunities of *Inſtruction* and Improvement, nor the ſame *immediate Impulſes* of the Bleſſed Spirit; where there is any *defect* in theſe Reſpects, God will *abate* proportionably in his *Expectations*; and he that received the *One* Talent, had he gained but *One other* with it, would have been call'd a *good and faithful Servant*, and been received into the *Joy* of his Lord.

Let us all therefore, endeavour to *grow* in *Grace* according to the *meaſure* of this unſpeakable Gift; to perform our Duties, each in his *Station*, and according to his *Ability*, faithfully and induſtriouſly; that when our Lord comes to make Enquiry into each ones Improvement of his Talent, and call for every ones particular Account, we may all, from the leaſt to the greateſt, chearfully give it up, and receive the immenſe Reward of a ſincere Diligence: For,

In the third place, There will moſt certainly be a Time when our Great Lord will come to take Account of every Man's *Improvement* of the Grace that was given him, and *Reward* every Man according to his Deſerving.

That there will certainly be a Day of Judgment both of Quick and Dead, when every Man

Man shall be rewarded *according to that he hath done in the Body, whether it be good or evil*, is a Truth so evident from Scripture, that those who have read, and do believe *those* Writings, can make no doubt of it: And the Proof of this from *Reason*, has been so convincingly manag'd by several Learned Pens, particularly of late by Dr. *Sherlock* in his Excellent Discourse upon Judgment, that I think nothing can be added to it; I shall only therefore Collect such a Description of that Great Day, and the Proceedings in it, out of the *Revelations* (where it is the most movingly represented) as may incline us all with the greatest *Diligence*, and *immediately*, by *Self-Examination* and Amendment of every evil Way, to prepare for that great Audit, that we may give up our Accounts *with joy, and not with grief*. In the 20th Chapter of the *Revelations*, ver. 12. after the divine Apostle had given a Description of the Appearing of the great Judge upon his Throne, *I saw a great White Throne*, says he, *and him that sat on it; from whose face the Earth and the Heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them*: He proceeds, *I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the Books were opened. And another Book was opened, which is the Book of Life; and the dead were judged out of those Things that were written in the Books, according to their Works; and the Sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and the Grave deliver'd up the dead*

dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their Works: And whoſoever was not written in the Book of Life, was caſt into the Lake of Fire.

That is, The Records ſhall then be laid open, wherein every Man's Receipt of Grace is enter'd, and thoſe whoſe Works ſhall be found *proportionably good* according to the *Aſſiſtance* they have receiv'd from *Above*; or, in the Stile of the Parable, that have made an anſwerable Improvement to the Number of Talents committed to them, their Names ſhall be written in the Book of Life, and they received into the eternal Joy of their Lord. But thoſe who can then give no good Account of their Talents, ſhew no ſuitable Improvement in Holineſs according to the meaſure of Grace they have received, ſhall never ſee Life, but be *caſt into the Lake of Fire, which is the ſecond Death.* And becauſe ſo very few will be ſo *wiſe*, as to make due Preparation for this great Day of Account, by improving the Grace God has given them to the great Ends for which it was deſign'd; therefore, as 'tis deſcrib'd *Rev.* 3.ᵛ. 15. *The Kings of the Earth, and the great Men, and the rich Men, and the chief Captains, and the mighty Men, and every Bond-man, and every Free-man,* many of all Qualities and Conditions, from the higheſt to the loweſt, *ſhall hide themſelves in Dens, in Rocks, and Mountains, and ſay to the Rocks and Mountains, fall on us, and hide us from the face*

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of him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the Wrath of the Lamb; for the great Day of his Wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand! May these Terrors of the Lord perswade us to provide *in this our day, for the Things that belong to our Peace, before they be hid from our eyes! looking for*, by frequent Meditation, and hastning unto, by a diligent Improvement of our Talents, *the coming of this dreadful day of God*; and being above all things careful, *That we be found of him in Peace, without spot and blameless; for God will bring every secret Thing into Judgment, whether it be good or evil*, and exactly adapt every Man's Recompense to his Work. Which brings me to the next Thing I am to consider in this Parable; namely,

Fourthly, That, at that great Day of Account, when every Man's Work is fully known, and his *Improvement* compar'd with what he has *receiv'd*; the Diligent shall not only in general be receiv'd into the Joy of their Lord, and the unprofitable cast into outer Darkness; but the *most* Diligent, those that have made the *greatest* Improvement, shall receive the *greatest share* of Happiness: And those that have been *most careless* and Unprofitable, shall be doom'd to the *greatest misery*. That is, in short, there will be *degrees* of Happiness or Misery respectively, awarded to Men according to the *degrees* of their Holiness or Impiety.

I know this has been much question'd by some,

ſome, and wholly deny'd by other's; and their main Reaſon againſt it I conceive to be this: That ſince the Happineſs of the *Juſt* in Heaven conſiſts in the *Viſion of God*, or the Excellencies and Beauties of the Divine Nature, which will fill a holy Soul with eternal and inexpreſſible *Delight*, for ſo St. *John* expreſſes the Bliſs of Heaven, by *ſeeing God as he is*, 1 Joh. 3. 2. and St. *Paul*, by *ſeeing him face to face, and knowing him even as we are known*, 1 Cor. 13. 12. And ſince the Miſery of the *Wicked in Hell* conſiſts in an eternal *Baniſhment* from his Divine Preſence; for ſo the Sentence runs that ſhall be paſs'd upon them at the Day of Judgment, *Depart from me ye Curſed*, &c. Upon theſe Accounts it ſeems to them moſt probable, that *All* the *Juſt*, being admitted to the *Beatifick Viſion of God*, ſhould be *equally Happy*, and *All* the *Wicked* being for ever *exil'd from him*, ſhould be *equally Miſerable*.

But this Argument in my Apprehenſion, is ſo far from *deſtroying* the Doctrine of the Degrees of Happineſs and Miſery in Heaven and Hell, that I think 'tis rather a great *Supporter* of it. For, ſince 'tis very true, that the Happineſs of Heaven conſiſts in the *Beatifick Viſion of God*, and the Miſery of Hell in an eternal *Baniſhment* from him; and ſince 'tis as true, that *ſome* good Men in *this* Life, approach nearer to him, and ſee more of his Excellencies, and bear a greater Reſemblance to him than *others*, and ſo become *capable* of a more *intimate*

Vision of him in Heaven; and *some* bad Men, on the contrary, wander to a *greater distance* from him *here*, and become *more unlike* him by their *great* Impieties than other Sinners do; and so become more *incapable* of that *pure* and holy Vision, than those that are *less* wicked: Since this is so, methinks nothing is more agreeable to Reason and Justice, than those who were the Holyest Men here, should be the Happiest Saints above; and those who were the deepest sunk in Wickedness in this World, should be plung'd into an equal Degree of Misery in the next; and consequently feel the *most exquisite* Pangs of Horror and Despair, the *hottest* Boilings of Rage and Impatience, and *most bitter* Remorse of Soul, for bringing this *most miserable* Condition upon themselves; when *once* they might with much Ease and Pleasure have avoided it, and been for ever *happy* in the *Vision and Enjoyment of God.*

Indeed, as to plain Proof from *Scripture* of the *Degrees of Misery in Hell*, I must confess I cannot recollect any, unless the 12th Chapter of St. *Luke's* Gospel, v. 47. 48. and the 11th of St. *Matthew*, v. 22. *&c.* may be thought to be so, and would by no means *strain* God's Word beyond its due Extent; but as to Degrees of *Glory and Happiness* in Heaven, I think there are several Places that plainly enough establish that Doctrine; of which I shall mention but one, and that because 'tis part of a Parable

Parable exactly the ſame in the *concealed ſenſe* of it, with that I am now diſcourſing upon, only ſomething differently related by St. *Luke*. 'Tis in the 19th Chapter, the 15th and 4 following Verſes; where we find, when the King came to take Account of his Servants Improvement of what he left in their Hands to Trade with in his Abſence, he exactly proportion'd every Man's *Recompence* to the *Increaſe* he made of what was committed to his Charge; to him that had gain'd *Ten* Pounds, with the Pound his Lord left with him, was given Authority over as *many* Cities; and ſo to him that had gain'd *Five*, proportionably Authority over *Five*: Which I think can mean no leſs than this, that where there is different Degrees of Mens Improvement of *Grace* in *this* World, there ſhall be as different Degrees awarded of *Glory* and *Happineſs* in *Heaven*; and there being great Difference between the Degrees of Chriſtians *Improvement* here, there will be as great Difference in the Degrees of their *Happineſs* hereafter. And though every Saint in Heaven ſhall have as clear and intimate Viſion and Enjoyment of God as he is *capable* of, and partake in an agreeable Meaſure of the *Happineſs* that will flow from ſuch Viſion and Enjoyment, and be as Happy as 'tis poſſible for him to be; yet the *Capacity* of every Saint will not be *equal*; Some Souls will be more enlarg'd than others, and able to receive more Rays of the Divine Glory; and

so, though every of those Vessels of Honour shall be *full*, yet all will not *hold alike*; and one Star *there*, will differ from another Star in Glory.

'Tis true, indeed, that the Mind of *every* good Man shall then be clarified and refined, purg'd from the Dross and Soil contracted during its Residence in the Flesh, and rendred more agile and expedite in the Exercise of its several Faculties, and its Knowledge and Love of God vastly improved: But that Souls of *less* Improvements here, shall immediately upon their Departure from the Body, receive *extraordinary new Additions*, to equalize them to those of *higher* Attainments, is hard to imagine; and would mightily discourage the generous Endeavours of *Heroick* Piety and *Exemplary* Religion. But when every Man shall in that glorious Kingdom above, be rewarded according to the Degrees of his Piety; and a *great* Love to God, and *zealous* Prosecution of the Interest of Religion, and an *eminent* Sanctity, shall be crown'd with a *more* than *ordinary Glory* and Felicity in *Heaven*, 'twill mightily encourage a holy Soul to *forget*, with St. *Paul*, *the things that are behind, and press on to what is still before*, always aiming at still greater Degrees of *Perfection*, till Mortality shall be *swallow'd up of Life*.

The Improvement of this *Speculation* to *Practice* is this: That since the Degrees of Glory and Happiness in Heaven, shall be answerable

ſwerable to the Degrees of Men's Holineſs, and Improvement of their Talents upon Earth; we would run with *Diligence* the Race that is ſet before us, and gird up the Loins of our Mind, and ſet our ſelves to the Performance of every thing that it well-pleaſing in the ſight of God with *Cheerfulneſs*; and not pretend *Difficulty*, when the Reward is ſo exceeding great, and ſhall be proportion'd to the Degrees of our Vertue. For can we be *too happy*? Can we be *too like God*? Can our Crown be too glorious and reſplendent? Away then with that mean ſpirited Religion which thus leſſens and *confines* our Happineſs; let us unfold our Hands, and pluck them out of our Boſoms, and encourage our ſelves in a vigorous Purſuit of an *excellent Piety*; *foraſmuch as we know, that our Labour ſhall not be in vain in the Lord.*

Fifthly, In the next Place, I am to ſhew, that 'tis abominably *falſe and impious*, with the Unprofitable Servant in the Parable, to charge God with being *unreaſonably rigid* and *ſevere*, in taking ſo ſtrict an Account of Mens *Improvement* of his Divine *Grace* and Aſſiſtances, and expecting to find a good Uſe made of what he committed to their Truſt.

That God is often charg'd with ſuch unreaſonable *Severity*, by Men that care not to perform their Duty, is too true to be queſtion'd; and ſuch as love to indulge their vile Affections, and cannot afford to take any pains

to be Religious, are frequently heard to say, They serve God as well as they *can*, and they can do no more; and that *such* a Religion as *we* urge Men to, is much too hard for Flesh and Blood: 'Tis a Law fitter for Angels than Men; and though they *wish* they could observe and do it, and can't but *consent to the Excellency of it in the Inner-Man*, yet they find a *Law in their Members warring against the Law of their Minds, and bringing them into Captivity to the Law of Sin*; and so, *the good that they would they do not, and the evil that they would not that they do.* And they take up with this as a *sufficient Excuse*; and because God is infinitely *merciful* and *good*, they think he will accept the Plea of the great *Hardship* of his Commands, and their *Inability* to perform them, instead of Obedience to them. But, (as the Lord in the Parable said to his slothful Unprofitable Servant) Out of their own Mouths will I judge those wretched Persons, that thus mock and abuse God, and deceive their own Souls into Ruin. For, if God be infinitely *good* and *merciful*, then certainly, he will not expect any Thing from Men beyond their *Ability*, nor command their Service and Obedience any farther than they are able to pay it: And consequently, what this *merciful* and *good* God commands by *All* Men to be done without any Exception or Dispensation, and threatens Eternal Misery to such as shall dare wilfully to *disobey* him; this, *Every* Man, no question

queſtion, is able to perform, through the Divine Grace and Aſſiſtance; which, as I have before prov'd is in ſufficient meaſure given to every Man. And to *deny* this, is, in effect, to charge God with the greateſt *Cruelty*, *Oppreſſion*, and *Injuſtice* that is poſſible. For what leſs, is the giving Men ſuch Commands as they are not *able* to *perform*, and withal threatning, and actually *inflicting*, *unconceivable* Torments (for ſuch are thoſe of *Hell*) upon all that ſhall be found diſobedient to the *impracticable* Law? This would be, indeed, to require Brick without Straw, as the *Egyptian* Taſkmaſters did, and then to lay on Stripes for a Failure in the Work; nay, 'twould be infinitely *worſe*, becauſe the Puniſhment for Irreligion, and not improving our Talents, is infinitely *greater*, and ſhall be inflicted to all *Eternity*.

Since therefore, God knows whereof we are made, and remembers that we are but Duſt, and can tell how difficult his Commands will be to us, and how proportionable our *Ability* is to keep and do them, better than we our ſelves, (for 'tis *he* that hath made us, and gave us our *Natural* Powers and Faculties, and the Superadditions of *Grace* and *Aid* from Above;) ſince he is infinitely *good*, and will not *overload* his Creatures, nor exact *impoſſible* Tasks, or ſuch as are *extremely difficult*, and but one degree *below* impoſſible; ſince he is likewiſe infinitely *juſt*, and will not *damn* Myriads

of poor Wretches to all Eternity, for not making an *impossible* Improvement of their Talents; and expects only that they should give a *reasonable* Account, according to what they have receiv'd from him: From all this it will follow, Not that therefore a Man shall be excus'd for pleading *Inability*, but that every Man is *Able*, through the never deficient Grace of that good God to such as heedfully attend to it, to *keep* his holy, just, and good Commands, and make *Improvement* suitable to the Talents he hath receiv'd; and if, for all this, he perish, his Blood will be upon his own Head.

Wherefore, let no Man, for the future, be so impious as to charge God with expecting *impossible* Services from his Creatures, or think to palliate his Irreligion by crying out of the extreme *Hardship* of living like a Christian; but let every Man set heartily and sincerely about his Duty, and he will find, that God's *Grace* will be *sufficient* for him to his daily Improvement, and that the ways of Religion are *ways of pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace.*

I come now to the *last* Thing to be consider'd in this Parable; which is, That the Condition of the diligent *Improvers* of their Talents will be unspeakably *happy*, but the Condition of the *Unprofitable*, beyond Expression *miserable*; and that, both in *this* World and in the *next*.

First,

Firſt, The Condition of the diligent *Improvers* of their Talent, will be unſpeakably *happy*, both in *this* World and *that* above. In *this* World, a quiet and ſerene Conſcience will be to them a *continual Feaſt*; the Senſe of having perform'd their Duty according to their *Ability*, of having been good Stewards of the Grace of God beſtow'd upon them, and that they can give a *ſincere* Account, tho' not a *perfect* one, to their great Maſter, when he ſhall come to look into their Behaviour in their Stewardſhip; this, will fill their Breaſts with unſpeakable Satisfaction, their Soul will be *calm*, and their Thoughts at Reſt in Conſcience of their *Fidelity*, their Life not imbitter'd with anxious Fear and Dread of a ſad *After*-Reckoning: but, like that of a faithful Servant who is in his Maſter's Favour, ſteady and eaſie, and moving cheerfully in the Circle of his Duty, and in joyful Expectation of the Reward of his Diligence, when his great Lord ſhall advance him from the State of a *Servant* to that of a *Friend* and Boſom-*Favourite*; nay, of a Coheir with himſelf of the Joys and Felicities of the Eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

And beſides this Serenity and Satisfaction of Mind, and comfortable Proſpect of ſo glorious a Recompenſe of Reward, (which are Bleſſings of the firſt Magnitude, and to which, nothing in *this* World is *comparable*) the *improving* Chriſtian ſhall have *more Talents* given him,

him, more Grace shower'd down upon his Soul; what the *Slothful* have forfeited, shall be conferr'd upon him, and he shall *abound* still *more and more* in every good Word and Work. And what Condition can approach nearer to the state of *Heavenly Glory*, than that of a holy Soul thus *plentifully* stor'd with the *Divine Grace*? And if *Grace* and *Glory* differ only in *degree*, and the One be but the Completion and Perfection of the other; a Soul so *filled* with Grace as the *improving* Soul will be, must needs live a *Heaven upon Earth*, and have frequent *Antepasts* of *Glory*.

And in that *other* World, when the Glory shall be *reveal'd*, that is prepared for them that love and serve our Lord Jesus in Sincerity; *then* will their Happiness be as *ineffable* as *endless*. It is express'd in this Parable, by *entring into the Joy of our Lord*; that is, partaking of *his* Glories and Felicities in the Presence of the Immortal God.

They shall be conducted (after having given a good Account of their Stewardship) by the Blessed Angels, into the Presence of the great King of Heaven, where they shall *see him face to face*; and with *wondring* Eyes and *enravish'd* Hearts, behold his *Glory*, gaze upon his Splendors, and nearly view *his* Beauty, who is the *Fountain of Perfection*. *He*, who is *Light it self*, and in whom is *no Darkness at all*, will *hide* nothing of his Glory from the Eyes of their *pure* and *prepar'd* Minds; but communicate

cate the Knowledge of his moſt excellent Nature, to the utmoſt *Capacity* of their Beatified Souls, and make 'em *full* of Divine Gladneſs, with the Joy of his *Countenance*. Their *Apprehenſions* ſhall be *clear'd* and *brightned*, their *Faculties* act upon this beſt of Objects *vigorouſly*, and without any Hindrance or *Diſtraction*; and every View of the Divine Beauty ſhall diſcover *new* Graces and Perfections (for God is an Immenſe and Fathomleſs *Ocean* of Beauty, as *Plato* excellently expreſſes it) and their Capacities by every ſuch View ſhall be *enlarg'd*, and made ſtill more and more *capacious*, for the Reception of a following *greater* Manifeſtation. And ſo, their *Love* and *Admiration* of this Divine Being always *increaſing*, and their Enjoyment of him compleat and full, to the utmoſt of their Capacity, their Joy and Happineſs will be, like that of *God himſelf*; becauſe ſpringing from the *ſame Fountain*, *Unſpeakable* and *Eternal*.

And ſince the Reward of a *Pious Induſtry*, will be ſuch *an Exceeding and Eternal* Weight of Glory; methinks we ſhould take off our Affections from theſe *lower* Goods, and doat no longer upon theſe vain and worthleſs *Trifles*, nor throw away our Love upon that which *ſatisfieth* not, *and ſpend our Labour for that which is not Bread*; but make it our great Endeavour to be *rich towards God*, and by improving the Talents he hath given us, lay up a *Treaſure in Heaven*: Remembring, That

Eye

Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither can it enter into the Heart of Man, to conceive the things which God hath prepar'd for them that love him, 1 Cor. 2. 9. And certainly, that Diligence is *well* bestowed, which shall be rewarded with a *Crown of Glory, Eternal in the Heavens.*

But with the *Unprofitable* and *Slothful* Servant it is not so, neither in this World nor in the next. In *this* World, the *Lashes* of a *guilty Conscience* will be unto him a *Continual Torment*; the Sense of his having carelesly neglected his Duty, and not performing, according to his *Ability*, the Just Commands of his great Lord; but being an Unfaithful Steward of the Grace of God bestowed upon him, and that he is far from being able to give in a good Account, when his Lord shall come, expecting the Improvement of his Talent: *This* will fill his Breast with unspeakable Trouble and Perplexity, and imbitter all his Worldly Enjoyments with the Mixture of Anxious Fear, and Dread of a severe *After-Reckoning*; and the terrifying Expectation of his sad Fate that will ensue, will be to him, even like a *Hell upon Earth*; and cruciate his Soul with unspeakable *Pangs and Agonies.* And, which is much worse still, the *Grace* that has so long lain *unimprov'd*, shall at length be taken *from him*; and the Man, as *desperate* and irreclaimable, be given over, and as 'twere *seal'd* up to *Remediless Misery.* And in the *next* World, at

at that great Day, when he ſhall be actually call'd to give Account of his Works, the Dire Sentence of *Depart from me ye Curſed into Everlaſting Fire, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels*, ſhall ſtrike him through with Horror and Confuſion; and he ſhall be driven into *Outer Darkneſs*, where he ſhall Eternally *bewail* his Miſerable Condition, and *gnaſh his Teeth* in bitter Remorſe for bringing himſelf to that Place of Torment, by ſlothfully neglecting the Improvement of that Divine Grace; with which he might, if he would, have work'd out his Salvation: Crying out to Eternal Ages in utter Deſpair, and moſt tormenting Agonies of Soul, *O that I had conſider'd in that my Day, the things that did belong unto my Peace; but now, they are for ever hid from mine Eyes!*

And now, for a Concluſion of this Diſcourſe. Here is in this Parable we ſee, on the one Hand, all the *Encouragement* in the World to Diligence and *Induſtry*, and a Lively Improving Piety; ſuch as more and more Abundance of Grace, with all the Bleſſed Attendants of it in *this* World, and a full Enjoyment of God himſelf in *Heaven*. And on the other ſide, here is, what if duly conſider'd, will make any Man afraid of Spiritual *Sloth* and Idleneſs, and not dare to neglect the *Improvement* of his Talent; for if he does, he ſhall be depriv'd of God's Grace here, and doom'd to Eternal Miſery at the Day of Judgment.

ment. Wherefore, let us seriously consider what has been now commented upon this Parable; and beg of God so to bless it to our Good, that we may be inclin'd by it to make a due Improvement of the Talents he has committed to our Management, to his *Honour* and *Glory*, and our own *Eternal Salvation*.

The PRAYER.

MOST Glorious God, the Fountain of Perfection, whom I humbly acknowledge to be the giver of every good and perfect Gift; I beseech thee assist me with thy Grace, that according to thy Just Expectation, I may make a suitable Improvement of the Talents I have receiv'd from thy Bounty, to thy Glory and the Publick Good. And may my Industry be excited by this great Consideration, That thou wilt certainly call me to give an Account of my Improvement, and very speedily perhaps, and proportionably reward or punish me in the Eternal World. I thankfully own, most merciful Father, that thou hast given me sufficient Grace wherewith to arrive at the End of my Hopes, and art not at all wanting to me in this unspeakable Gift; O may I not be wanting to my self, and neglect and bury this most Precious Talent, but with Diligence and Carefulness endeavour to work out my Salvation with it in Fear and Trembling: Remembering what Confusion I shall be in, how utterly

utterly without Plea or Excuſe, when for my Wicked Slothfulneſs thou ſhalt conſign me to outer Darkneſs, ſince thou didſt enable me to perform all thou expectedſt from me. And may the unſpeakably Happy Condition of the Diligent, encourage me to an Active Perſevering Piety, and always to abound in the Work of thee, my Lord; ſince I know my Labour ſhall not be in vain; but be rewarded with ſtill larger Additions of thy Grace in this World, and with the Participation, in great Degrees, of thy Glory in the next. O God, aſſiſt me more and more with this thy Heavenly Aid, and may I always gratefully acknowledge from whom I have receiv'd it, and return thee all the Praiſe of what I ſhall do well by thy Aſſiſtance, and always fear, leſt by my Negligence I forfeit it: That ſo, faithfully improving the Talents thou haſt here committed to my Truſt, I may, at the great Day of Retribution hear theſe Bleſſed Words, Well done good and faithful Servant, enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord. *Which grant, O Gracious God for the Sake of Jeſus, thy Beloved.* Amen.

PARABLE

PARABLE IX.

Of the Covetous Rich Fool.

Luke xii. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21.

And Jesus spake a Parable unto them, saying, The Ground of a certain Rich Man brought forth plentifully.

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do because I have no Room where to bestow my Fruits?

And he said this will I do; I will pull down my Barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my Fruits and my Goods.

And I will say to my Soul, Soul, thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years; take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said unto him, Thou Fool, this Night shall thy Soul be required of thee, then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?

So

So is he that layeth up Treaſure for himſelf, and is not Rich towards God.

THIS Parable was ſpoken upon Occaſion of one of our Lords Followers, deſiring him to Arbitrate between him and his Brother, in a difference about dividing their Patrimony; for ſo Verſe 13. of this Chapter, *one of the Company ſaid unto him, Maſter, ſpeak unto my Brother, that he divide the Inheritance with me.* To this our Lord anſwered in the 14. Verſe, *Man, who made me a Judge or a Divider over you?* And takes Occaſion from that Requeſt to him, rather to adviſe thoſe that were with him, and all that ſhould hereafter be his Diſciples, to *take Heed and beware of Covetouſneſs*, and that becauſe a *Man's Life* or Happineſs *conſiſteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he poſſeſſeth*; as 'tis in the 15. verſe. And to make this his Excellent Advice ſink deeper into their Minds, he ſpake the Parable I am now to Diſcourſe upon.

The Deſign of it, as we ſee from the Context, is to draw Men off from *Covetouſneſs*, or a too eager Deſire of heaping up Riches; and to expoſe the great *Folly* of being wholly intent upon laying up Treaſures in *this* Life, and taking little or no Care to be *rich towards God*. For, as that Rich Man in the Parable, whom God had bleſſed with an *extraordinary* Increaſe of the Fruits of the Earth, even to

more than his Barns could hold, did entertain Covetous Thoughts of building new ones to hoard it up in, and promis'd himself much Happiness from that Abundance, *Take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry, for thou hast Goods laid up for many Years:* As this Covetous Rich Man was surpriz'd with a sudden Summons into the other World, and snatch'd away from the midst of this Abundance, and upbraided with *Folly*, in trusting in such *uncertain* Riches; so, and for the very same Reasons, is every Covetous Rich Man an Egregious *Fool*, that *confides* in *Wealth*, and *neglects Religion*.

In my Discourse, therefore, upon this Parable, I shall do these Four things.

First, I shall give a short *Description* of the Vice of *Covetousness*.

Secondly, Endeavour to *expose*, both the great *Folly* and *Vileness* of this Vice; together with the Ill Consequences that attend it;

Thirdly, I will answer the Rich Fool's Question which he propos'd to himself upon the great Increase he had, *What shall I do, because I have no Room where to lay my Fruits?* And,

Fourthly, Shew the great *Wisdom* of not setting our *Hearts* upon, nor *eagerly* pursuing Wealth, and of bestowing it as Religion does direct, should it please God in an extraordinary Manner to bless us with it.

And

And after all, I will urge this upon Men's *Practice*, and ſo conclude this Argument.

Firſt, I am to give a ſhort *Deſcription* of the Vice of *Covetouſneſs*, that we may know what it is that this Parable would incline us to *avoid*.

The *Covetouſneſs* this Parable warns againſt (for there are ſeveral Sorts of it) is an *Immoderate* Deſire of *heaping* up Riches, or of having ſtill *more and more* Wealth, after we have ſufficient for the *Comfortable* Support of our ſelves and Relatives; that we may for the Future, live in greater *Eaſe* and *Luxury*.

Firſt, This Covetouſneſs is an *Immoderate* Deſire of Riches; for *all* Deſire of Riches is not Criminal, and a Man may very lawfully *deſire*, and as lawfully, by all due Means, endeavour to procure *ſo much* Wealth as is needful for his own and his *Families* Comfortable Maintenance, and will enable him to be kind to the Poor. But, to deſire even *this* with *Impatience*, and over-great *Solicitude*, is the Sin of Covetouſneſs; and the Sin is very much *aggravated* when a Man greedily deſires ſtill *on*, when his Comfortable Subſiſtance, and ſufficient Proviſion for his Family is already provided for.

Again, *immoderately* to deſire to heap up Riches is *Covetouſneſs*, though we may intend afterwards to *enjoy* them, to *eat, and drink, and be merry*, and take our *Eaſe* the more, as the Rich Man in the Parable purpos'd to do;

for this distinguishes *Covetousness* from extreme *Parsimony* and *Niggardliness*. They *agree* indeed in this, that they are both an *extreme Desire of Riches*, but they *differ* likewise in *this*, that the *Covetous* may eagerly desire to *get* Riches with a Design afterwards as prodigally to *spend* them, but the *Niggard* hoards up what he has got, and endeavours to scrape more to it with a Purpose not to make use of it *himself*, nor to let any body *else* touch it, as long as he can help it. And these, though they are *both* very *great Vices*, yet *Niggardliness* is, I think, by much the greater of the Two. But 'tis the extreme Desire of heaping up Riches, tho' with a Purpose to *enjoy* them, that is the Vice this Parable is levell'd against; for the Rich Man *there* intended to inlarge his Barns, and lay up his Increase in them, *that he might take his ease, and eat, and drink, and be merry*; which is a Kind of *Covetousness*, that though very *many* are *guilty* of, yet few think it deserves to be call'd by that hateful Name.

There is one thing more to be explain'd in this Description of Covetousness, namely, What is meant by such a Proportion of Riches as is sufficient for the *Comfortable* Subsistence of a Man and his Relatives? And the Answer to this must be in *General*; (for to *Particularize* in this Case would be endless) *that* is sufficient for the Comfortable Subsistence of every Man and his Family, which will secure them according to their *Station* and *Degree*,

from

from *Want*; and provide Plenty of what is neceſſary to *Life*, and *Health*, and *Decency*, though it does not ariſe to the *Pomps* and *Vanities* of the World: For he that hath *this*, has, no queſtion, what is ſufficient for a very comfortable Subſiſtence to any *Reaſonable* Man. And he that is not ſatisfied with *ſuch* a Degree of Wealth as *this*, will never be ſatisfied with *any*, be it never ſo *great*.

He therefore that at *all* deſires Riches *impatiently*, much more, he, that when he has a Reaſonable *Sufficiency* of Wealth, covets ſtill *more*, that he may *ingroſs* it to *himſelf*, and the more indulge his *Luxury*, to the Neglect of better things, and builds his Hopes of *Happineſs* upon ſuch a Multitude of Riches; is guilty of the *Covetouſneſs* this Parable was ſpoken againſt: And the *Folly* and *Vileneſs* of which Vice, I am in the *Second* Place to expoſe, and ſhew what very *Ill* Conſequences do attend it.

And *firſt*, All *Immoderate Deſire* of Riches, upon what Account ſoever, is a very great *Folly*. *Immoderately* to deſire *any* thing is queſtionleſs a *Folly*; for all *Immoderation* is fooliſh and *unreaſonable*, as muſt be acknowledg'd by every Man at firſt ſight: and immoderate *Deſire* is a kind of *Rack* and *Torture* to the Mind, which for a Man in *any* Caſe to bring upon *himſelf*, is certainly a *Folly*, and therefore in *General*, it muſt be allow'd to be a great Piece of *Folly*, *immoderately to deſire*

Riches. But more *Particularly* it is so upon the following Accounts.

First, Because 'tis so very *uncertain*, whether a Man shall *attain* his Desire, or no. There are so many *cross* Accidents incident to the *Pursuit* of Riches, let Men take what Course they will, that 'tis generally the most *precarious* thing in the World. If a Man crosses the *Seas* for Wealth, as *uncertain* as the *Winds* and *Waters* are, as *numerous* as the *Rocks* and *Quick-sands*, and *Sea Robbers*; so great is the *Uncertainty*, whether *that* way he shall *have* what he *desires*, and *heap up Wealth*, or no. If, for more *Security* he stays at *Home*, and by *Domestick* Employments endeavours to be *rich*; whatever his Employment is, he is not sure he shall have *Health* to pursue it; or if he *has*, that his Endeavours will be *successful*; Ten Thousand unforeseen Accidents may destroy a very *hopeful* Beginning, and one *Month* may set him further *back* than he has *advanc'd* in *Twenty Years*; and *one* unlucky Hit may reduce him to *Poverty*, after he has arriv'd *almost* to the *Completion* of his Desires. In *other* Cases, there are some *certain Means* that seldom *fail* of their respective Ends; as *Learning*, where there is an *Aptitude* for it in *Nature*, may certainly be acquired by Ingenuous Education, Diligent Study, and Good Conversation; and when there is a Natural *Genius* likewise, Men seldom fail by Good Instruction and

and *Induſtrious Practice*, of becoming Artiſts in their ſeveral Profeſſions. But *Riches* do ebb and flow *unaccountably*; ſometimes the greateſt *Induſtry fails* of them, and they fall *unexpectedly* upon the *Idle* and the Negligent; and as often, when Men think they are within their *Reach*, they make themſelves Wings and fly away they know not how. 'Tis like a Child's purſuit of a *Graſs-hopper*, whoſe Motions are ſo very *irregular*, that he finds it a very difficult Matter at all to come *near* it; and when at length, after much Pains, he thinks he has gain'd his Prize, and eagerly puts forth his Hand to ſeize it, the nimble Inſect leaps to a further Diſtance from him than before. Even juſt ſo (how ruſtick ſoever the Compariſon may be) is it very often with Men that *immoderately* deſire, and *eagerly purſue* Riches; there's no *regular* Way of proceeding that a Man may ſecurely *depend* upon in the Caſe; The Ebbs and Flows of *Wealth* are as various and unaccountable as the Motions of that little *Inſect*, 'tis as hard a matter to come within *reach* of them, and Men are as often baulk'd when they think they have them in their Poſſeſſion. And this can't but have been the *Obſervation* of *every* Man that has liv'd any while in the World, and taken Notice of the Proceedings in it; and has been the coſtly *Experience* of very *many*. Now, for a Man *immoderately* to *deſire*, and *impatiently* to purſue, what there is no ſure and *ſteady* Way

of *attaining*; and when, for any thing he can tell, after all his Pains, and the Uneasiness consequent upon his eager Desire, he shall *miss* of his *End*; nay, when 'tis a Thousand to One but he *shall* miss of it (for of a *Thousand* that immoderately *desire* great Riches, there is, modestly speaking, scarce *One* that attains them) for a Man to suffer the Torment of an *immoderate Desire* of what there is so little Probability of *attaining*; is certainly a great Piece of *Weakness* and *Folly*; and *almost* as bad, as if a Man should endeavour eagerly all his Days to enclose the *Wind* in his *Fist*.

And this Comparison, as *extravagant* as it may seem, is countenanc'd by the *wisest* of Men; who, in the 5th Chapter of *Ecclesiastes*, 16th Verse, after he had, for Five or Six Verses before, expos'd the *folly* of an immoderate Desire of Wealth; asks this Question, *What Profit hath he that hath labour'd for the Wind*? *All his Days* (as 'tis verse 17.) *he eateth in Darkness*, or Uncertainty of the Event, and *hath much Sorrow, and Wrath with his Sickness*, *i. e.* as 'tis express'd elsewhere by the same wise Preacher, *the deferring of his Hope maketh his Heart sick*, and much is his Trouble and Vexation in pursuing what is *Vanity of Vanities*. And therefore with great Reason does St. *Paul* warn Men not to trust in *uncertain Riches*, or the *Uncertainty* of Riches, which a Man is as uncertain of *getting*, as of *keeping* when he hath them. 1. *Tim.* 6. 17. And to

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reaſſume the former Compariſon, as *the Wind bloweth where it liſteth, and we hear the Sound of it, but cannot tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth*; ſo *unaccountable* are the Motions of *Wealth*. For all any Endeavours of ours, Wealth will take its own courſe and change maſters or *ſervants* rather as it liſteth; and tho' there is a great deal of *Noiſe* made with it, and about it, yet no Man can certainly ſay, *whence* it *cometh*, by what Methods he may be ſure to procure it, nor *whither* it *goeth*, by what means 'tis loſt by one, and paſſeth another.

And this is the *firſt* Reaſon why an *immoderate* Deſire of *Riches* is a great *Folly*, becauſe 'tis ſo ſtrangely *uncertain* whether a Man ſhall have that Deſire of his *gratified* or no, nay, a Thouſand to One that he ſhall *not*. A *moderate* Portion of this World's Good may be moderately deſir'd by a wiſe Man, becauſe there is no great Fear of his being *diſappointed*, and Induſtry is generally rewarded with a *Comfortable* Subſiſtence: but impatiently to thirſt after *great* Riches, is an Egregious *Folly*, becauſe 'tis great Odds, but 'twill be to *no purpoſe*.

But *ſecondly*, ſhould it be to *ſome Purpoſe* thus eagerly to deſire and endeavour after great Riches, and the Man *gains* what he would have; yet, after all, the Purchaſe is not *great*, nor will it countervail the Uneaſineſs the whole Man endures in the *immoderate Deſire* and earneſt Purſuit of it. What *toilſom*

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Days and *restless* Nights, what Servitude and *Drudgery* do those go through who resolve, if possible, to raise large Estates, and greater Families? How many *low* pitiful things are they fain to truckle to, nay, what is worse, how much *cheating* and underhand dealing, how much *Violence* and *Oppression* is there committed by those that make *haste* to be rich? What *Discontents* and *repining* at (as they think) their *slow* Progress, how does every Rub and *Hindrance* go to their very Heart, and their frequent Baulks and *Disappointments*, pierce them thorough with *more* and more *pungent* Sorrows, than all their Wealth, tho' they have Hearts to enjoy it, will ever make amends for?

If abundance of Gold and Silver would certainly make a Man *wiser* and *better*, if 'twould *clear* his *Apprehension*, or *strengthen* his *Memory*, or improve his *Reasoning*; if 'twould make him more prudent and *discreet* and of a *riper Judgment*; if 'twould increase *Piety* and *Religion*, and promote a *Godlike* Frame of Spirit; nay, if 'twould but so much as refine a Mans *Temper*, and make him of more sweet and *obliging Behaviour*, or *regulate* the *Passions* and Affections of the Soul, and help him to Tranquility of Mind, and cure *Anger*, and *Pride*, and *Envy*, and *Lust*, and *Revenge*, or the like; if abundance of Riches would work any of *these good Effects*, 'twould be worth while earnestly to desire them, and industriously to endeavour

deavour to procure them: But when 'tis ſo *far* from *this*, that the direct *contrary* is general obſervable in thoſe that have the greateſt Riches in Poſſeſſion; it muſt, I think, be allow'd to be a very great Piece of *Folly*, for a Man to *endure* ſo *much* for what, when he has it, will not *countervail*.

But, though greedy *Worldlings* may own, that great Riches have little or no Influence upon the Happineſs and Improvement of the *Inner Man*: yet, becauſe a Man has a *Body* as well as a *Soul* to take care of, they are thus greatly deſirous of much Wealth, becauſe 'twill help them to the Enjoyment of much of *this* World's Happineſs, and acquire what will highly pleaſe and gratifie the *Body*; as the Rich Man in the Parable ſaid, they may take their *eaſe*, *eat*, *drink*, *and be merry*, when they have *much Goods laid up for many Years*. I ſhall therefore in the

Second Place ſhew, the *folly* of expecting even *this* World's Happineſs from Abundance of Riches.

For beſides, that the Appetites of the Body are generally obſerved to be more ſickly and *deprav'd* in *rich* than *poorer* Perſons; their *Sleep*, worſe rather than better than other Mens; *the Abundance of the Rich will not ſuffer him to ſleep*, ſays *Solomon*, *but the Sleep of the Labouring Man is ſweet, eat he little or eat he much*: Eccleſ. 5. 12. And that *Health* is much more a Stranger to the *Rich* than to the

the *Meaner* sort, and the Pleasures of having a Body Vigorous and Active, without the Encumbrance of Weakness and Diseases, almost engross'd by the Labouring Poor: Besides this, (which yet alone is enough to prove, that 'tis a *folly* to expect even this World's Happiness from abundance of Riches, for without *Health*, which Luxury destroys the most of any thing, there is no Taste or Relish in any other of its Enjoyments;) there is this One Reason more, among others, that will farther, and I think *evidently* prove, that 'tis a very great Folly to expect to be *happier* even in *this* World, by growing Richer; and it is this, That Riches are of all Things the most *unsatisfying*, and the most *perplexing*.

Other Good Things of this World do in some sort *satisfie*; and Men are often *cloy'd* with *Pleasures*, have enough of Mirth and Jollity, of Recreations and Diversions, and the like; and the Mind is, for a *while*, eas'd and refresh'd by them: But as for *Riches*, as they *increase*, the Desire of still *more*, *increases* proportionably, nay, rather *disproportionably* with them; and 'twas never yet known, that a *worldly-minded* Man ever thought he had *enough*, but that his Appetite grew *keener* after Wealth, the more 'twas fed with it: And 'tis not unusual, to hear the greatest Complaints, Murmurings and Repinings from the *richest* Men. And as for the *Perplexity* that attends *Abundance* of Wealth, that likewise

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is as evident to common Obſervation. The more a Man *hath*, the more Care he muſt take to *preſerve* it, the more Quarrels and Law-Suits will he be embroil'd in; and when there are Troubles and Commotions in the State, and Times grow dangerous and uncertain, then are the greateſt *Worldlings* fulleſt of Fears and dreadful Apprehenſions; and not only *real*, but *imaginary* Dangers, terrifie their Unman'd Souls; Things always appearing with the worſt Aſpect to *their* troubled Fancies, who have made *Gold* their *Deity*, and ty'd up their Happineſs in their *Bags*. And nothing, certainly, can be more *perplexing* to a Man's Mind, than ſuch great Fears of *loſing That*, in the *poſſeſſion* of which his *whole Happineſs* is *concentred*.

And accordingly, *Solomon*, who had great Poſſeſſions, above All that were before him, and gather'd him Silver and Gold in ſuch Abundance, that Silver was in *Jeruſalem* common as the Stones in the Street, 1 *Kin.* 10. 27. after all, ſays he, *Eccleſ.* 5. 10, 11. *He that loveth Silver ſhall not be ſatisfied with Silver, nor he that loveth Abundance with Increaſe. And what Good is there to the Owners thereof, ſaving the beholding of it with their Eyes?* And even the *Eye is not ſatisfied with ſeeing* neither. And St. *Paul* ſays very plainly, That the *Love of Money is the Root of all Evil*, and they that *will be Rich, fall into Temptation and a Snare, and pierce themſelves through with divers Sorrows*;

rows; and that *Contentment*, with only *Food and Raiment*, is a far greater Happiness, 1 *Tim.* 6. 9, 10. And therefore, good Reason had the Wisest King to say, after all his Increase, and the Abundance he had *amass'd* together, that it was, not only *Vanity*, but *Vexation of Spirit*, Eccles. 2. 11.

Now, that which can never *satisfie*, and as it *increases*, increases a Man's Trouble and Perplexity (which is true, we see, of Riches) is, no doubt, far from conducing to a Man's *Happiness* in *this World*, and therefore, 'tis a very great *Folly*, for any Man to depend upon Abundance of *Wealth* for *Happiness*, for 'tis rather, the Cause of much *Trouble* and *Disquietude*. Or however, God may suddenly deprive a rich *Worldling* of all he has by *Death*, and say, as in the Parable, *Thou Fool, this Night shall thy Soul be requir'd of thee, then whose shall those Things be which thou hast provided*? For, *As we brought nothing into the World, so 'tis certain we can carry nothing out.* And thus much for the *Folly* of Immoderate Desire of *Riches*, in Expectation of a *Happy Life* from *Abundance*. I proceed now to shew,

The *Vileness* of this sort of Covetousness, and of placing the Happiness of Life in great store of Wealth.

That 'tis a very *vile* Thing for a Man immoderately to covet *Riches*, and place the *Happiness* of his *Life* in *Abundance* of them, will be very evident, if we briefly consider what

what a Man is, and what *Abundance of Wealth* is, and what little or no *proportion* the *one* bears to the *Dignity* of the *other*. A Man is a Creature endow'd with a *Rational* and *Immortal* Soul, capable of Knowing, Admiring, Loving, and Enjoying *God*, who is the *Supreme Good* and the *Centre* of Felicity. As a *Chriſtian*, he is an adopted Son of God, Coheir with Chriſt of a Crown of *Glory* in the Eternal Kingdom of Heaven, and deſign'd to participate of thoſe Rivers of Divine Pleaſures that are at God's Right-hand for ever and ever. As for *Riches* (or Abundance of Gold and Silver, in which now-a-days we eſteem Riches chiefly to conſiſt) they are *really* no better than Heaps of *Earth* of different *Colours*, impreſs'd with different *Stamps*, and made of different *Sizes*, and to which Men have given a different *Value* and Eſteem, according to their different *Colour*, *Size*, and *Impreſſion*; and which in themſelves are good for little but to be *look'd on*, and which he that would *live* muſt part with when he has them, in Exchange for other Things that are neceſſary for his *Subſiſtence*.

Now what can be more *vile* and *baſe*, than for ſo *Noble* and Excellent a Creature as Man, ſo far to *degrade* himſelf, as to employ his greateſt *Love*, and *Admiration*, and *Deſire*, upon a Piece of *Earth*, which was originally made for him to *tread* upon, and produce Things for his Food and Pleaſure! To make

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that his *Master*, nay his *God*, which was *made* to be his *Servant*! For a *Rational Soul* to doat upon a senseless *Clod*, to neglect the Contemplation of the Excellencies of his *infinitely perfect Maker*, and admire one of the *lowest* of his *Creatures*; to desire a Piece of *Earth* with the greatest *Application*, and have *no Value* for the Immortal *Glories* of *Heaven*; to place his *Happiness* in what is so very much *inferiour* to him, and upon that which is *indeed* his *Happiness* to bestow no *Thoughts*; what can be more *vile* and abject than this! what more unbecoming the Dignity of the Rational Nature, and of a Creature that has such *glorious Hopes*! Where is the *Reason* of a Man that lays out all his Endeavours to acquire a *Trifle*, and in the mean time *disregards* that which is his *chief good*? and where is the *Religion* of a *Christian*, that has been *redeem'd*, not by *Corruptible Things*, *such as silver and gold*, *but with the Precious Blood of Christ*, *as of a Lamb without Blemish and without Spot*; where is *his* Religion, that notwithstanding this, makes *Silver* and *Gold* the chief Object of his *Affections*, *and treads under foot the Son of God*, *and counts the Blood of the Covenant*, *wherewith he was sanctified*, *an unholy*, or common, *Thing*, *and does despight to the Spirit of Grace*, and loves and admires *Mammon* more than his *Saviour*? What more *vile* and *brutish* than this, what more stupidly *ungrateful*! This is, to come down to a Level with the *Beasts that perish*;

periſh; nay, 'tis to ſink much *lower*; for *They* act according to their *Natural Inſtincts*, and chooſe as they are *directed* by their Great *Creator*, and ſerve him obediently in that Rank of Being in which he has plac'd them: But *that Man*, much more *that Chriſtian*, that makes *periſhing Riches* the main Object of his Deſires and Endeavours, acts directly *contrary* to the *Reaſon* that God has given him, *degenerates* many degrees below the Dignity of his Nature, diſobeys the Orders of his *Creator*, ſlights the Heavenly Counſel of his *Saviour*, deſpiſes the Glories and Felicities of the Kingdom of Heaven, and of a *Man* and a *Chriſtian* makes himſelf a vile *Muckworm*, delighted in nothing *Noble* and Excellent, but groveling upon the Earth, as if that were the *Centre* of his Happineſs. And what can more *vilifie* and *degrade* a *Reaſonable* Soul, made after the *Image* of God, than ſuch baſe Affections as theſe? 'Tis certainly a moſt vile Degeneracy, and renders a Man the moſt *contemptible* Creature in the Univerſe, both to *God* and *Angels*, and all *wiſe* and *good Men*.

And thus much may ſuffice to expoſe the *Folly* and *Vileneſs* of an *immoderate* Deſire of *Riches*, as in *them* placing the *Happineſs of Life*. I ſhall now ſhew

The ill Conſequences that attend it; which (beſides that great *Perplexity* of Mind they cauſe, mention'd before) are chiefly theſe *two*: (1.) It mightily hinders a Man's *Pro-*

gress in Religion, which is the *one Thing necessary*. (2.) It exposes a Man more than any thing, to the Danger of *Apostacy*, or *falling from the Truth*.

First, An immoderate Love of Riches does mightily hinder a Man's *Progress in Religion*, which is the *one Thing necessary*. We may remember, our Lord, in his Interpretation of a Parable (being discours'd of) *Mat.* 13. 22. says, that the *Cares of this World, and the Deceitfulness of Riches*, like *Thorns* that spring up with Seed, *choke the Word of God*, and render it *unfruitful*; and in another Parable of a great Supper made at the *Marriage of a King's Son*, by which (as was discours'd upon that Parable) is represented the glad Tidings and Invitations of the Gospel; he tells us, That *that* which *detain'd* Men from it, was likewise the *Cares of the World* and the *Love of Riches*; they had Ground to look after, and Oxen to prove, and therefore they could not come to the Wedding Supper. *Mat.* 22. *Luke* 14. 18. And accordingly says our Saviour, in as *express* Words as can be, *Mat.* 6. 24. *No man can serve two Masters, ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*

Now the *Reason* of this is two-fold: For *first*, Nothing so much *distracts* a Man's *Thoughts*, as an eager Desire and Pursuit of *Wealth*; for Riches are so difficult to be *acquir'd* (as has been said) and so very *slippery* when gain'd; that, as to *get* them will exercise

cise all a Man's *Contrivance*, employ all his Thoughts and *Attention*, and consume his whole *Time*; so to *keep* them when once gotten, will, to a Man that knows the *Hardship* of getting them, and how *soon* they are *lost* again, engage him in constant Care and Solicitude to *watch* his Idol, lest he be *depriv'd* of it; and so, his Mind becomes distracted with continual Apprehensions of *Danger*, and at leisure for no other Thoughts than how to *secure* his *Riches*. And this, those that are acquainted with Men much wedded to the World, may soon perceive by their careful anxious Looks, and distrustful Timorous Discourse. Now, the immoderate Love of Riches thus *engrossing* a Man's Soul; and the great Business of *Religion*, or making Provision for *Another* World, and laying up a Treasure of good Works in Heaven, being a Thing that likewise requires *Time* and *Diligence*, and a close Application of all our Faculties to the Performance of it; and it being impossible for a Man to attend closely to two Things at once; and the Love of *this* World, and of the *next*, being not only *different*, but *contrary* the one to the other: How can it be, but that he that *eagerly* loves *Riches*; and has the Soul prepossess'd with a strong Desire of *them*, and all his Faculties before engag'd in their Pursuit; must move very *slowly* in the Way of Religion, if he moves *at all*; nay indeed, rather move *backward* than *forward*; and the *more* he loves

the *World*, grow colder ſtill in his Affections to *God*.

Another Reaſon of this is, Becauſe an Immoderate Love of Mony is a kind of *Faſcination* and Enchantment: it caſts a *Miſt* before a Man's Underſtanding, and makes him leſs ſenſible and *apprehenſive* of the great Obligation to a Religious Life, and ſo dulls and ſtupifies the Soul, that it becomes very little moved with the Sermons of the Goſpel. What elſe ſhould be the Reaſon of that ſtrange *Unconcernedneſs* in the Worldly-minded, though preſs'd never ſo home with the Neceſſity of minding Religion more and the World leſs, of endeavouring, before all Things, to be *rich towards God*, and to give of their Abundance to the Relief of the Poor, and not to truſt in *uncertain* Riches, and the like? They give us the Hearing perhaps, and that's All, and go on ſtill in their own Courſe as earneſtly as ever; and if they offer any thing in their Defence, 'tis ſo ſtrangely *weak* that a Man can't but admire at it. Sometimes we ſhall hear them ſay, they don't know *what Streights* they may be reduc'd to yet before they dye, and therefore they think it but Prudence to provide for the worſt; forgetting all the while, that our Lord expreſly *forbids* all ſuch anxious Solicitude for the Morrow, and commands an humble Truſt in the Providence of God, who never forſakes thoſe that are moderately induſtrious, and depend upon him for a Bleſſing; and ne-

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ver reflecting upon the *miserable Streight* they will be in at the Day of Judgment, if destitute of good Works, and not able to give a sincere Account of their Stewardship

Sometimes these Men will quote Scripture, and tells us, the Apostle says, *He that provides not for his own House, is worse than an Infidel*, forgetting in the mean time the words of the same Apostle in another place, that *the Love of Mony is the Root of all Evil*; and those of our Saviour immediately before this Parable, *Take heed, beware of Covetousness, for a man's Life consisteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he possesseth.* And in *Mat.* 6. 32. *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you, for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things*; and that the *Covetous* are in the number of those that shall never see the Kingdom of Heaven. 1 *Cor.* 6. 10. *Eph.* 5. 5. Of all Vices that we reprove and warn Men against, *Covetousness* and *Worldly-mindedness* we find to be most *stubborn* and irreclaimable; and 'tis very seldom indeed, that we can stop a Man that is in a hot pursuit of Wealth; so strangely *bewitching* is this Love of Mony, and more than ordinary destructive of a true Sense of Religion in the Soul. And accordingly says our Lord, *How hard is it for a rich man* (one that makes a *God* of Riches, and confides and trusts in them) *to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven! 'tis easier for a Camel*

to pass through the Eye of a Needle. 'Tis next door to an Impossibility, and nothing but the Almighty Power of God changing his Heart, can make him capable of that Happiness. And St. *Paul* agreeably, *Not many rich, not many mighty are called, and the God of this World hath blinded the Eyes of those that believe not.* And the *Pythagoreans*, by the meer Light of Nature, were sensible of this, and taught their Scholars a Separation from the Affairs of the World, if they would Philosophize well, and find out pure Truth, and the Secrets of Wisdom. Wherefore, we see it highly concerns us, to take no *such* Thought for the Morrow, but endeavour to lay up a Treasure in Heaven; because, *Where our Treasure is, there will our Hearts be also*

Another very sad Consequence of an Immoderate Love of Riches, is, that it exposes a Man, more than any Thing besides, to Apostacy, or falling from the Truth. St. *Paul*, 1 *Tim.* 6. 9. says, *They that will be rich, fall into Temptation and a Snare*; and more expressly in the next verse, *The Love of Mony is the root of all Evil; which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the Faith*: and the Event has often prov'd this true; and the Hopes of gaining, and the Fear of losing Riches, has prevail'd with Thousands to turn *Apostates* to the Truth. For the sake of a little Mony 'twas, that *Judas* betray'd his Master and Saviour; and to tempt with Mo-

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ny, is a way of proceedure ſo very ſucceſsful, an Engine ſo almoſt irreſiſtable, that 'tis made uſe of by all ſorts that would gain Proſelites to a Party; and the great Tempter, with much Confidence, after his other Stratagems fail'd him, made Offer of *Riches* to our *Lord Himſelf* (as his beſt Reſerve) when he would perſwade him to Fall down and Worſhip him. And ſo unreaſonable a Love have Worldly-minded Men for Wealth, as to *be* and *do* any Thing at the Frowns or Promiſes of him who has Power to give or take away Riches. This has been the Experience of all former Ages, and too much of our *own* too, and will ſtill be ſo, till Men grow ſo wiſe as to know how to be content with Food and Raiment, and believe our Lord's Words, that *a mans Life conſiſteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he poſſeſſeth*, and *that Godlineſs with Contentment is the greateſt gain.* And therefore, as much as it concerns Men to be *conſtant* in the Profeſſion of the Truth of God, that is, as much as their *Salvation* is worth, ſo much it concerns them to *take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs.* For 'tis very true, in more Senſes than one, that it is *Idolatry.* Coloſ. 3. 5.

Having thus ſhewn, the great *Folly* and *Vileneſs* of an Immoderate Deſire of Riches, and of expecting the Happineſs even of *this* Life from Abundance of Wealth, and mention'd two very ill *Conſequences* of this Covetouſneſs; I proceed now to the

Third Thing I intended to do; which is, to Answer the Rich Fool's Question that he proposed to himself, upon the great Increase he had, *What shall I do because I have no room where to lay my fruits*? And shew, how many *good* Ways there are of Disposing of *Abundance*.

Of all the Ways of bestowing what was *more than his Barns would hold* (by which I suppose is express'd his having more than was needful to his own comfortable Subsistance) Covetousness would let this Rich Man think of none but of Building *New Barns* wherein to *lay up* his Abundance, and then to *take his ease, and eat, and drink, and be merry*: He looked no farther than *Himself*, and the more God's Blessings increas'd upon him, the more he purpos'd to live in Luxury and Excess, and *Epicurize* away that which God gave him to a quite different, and much better Purpose.

Quod superat non est melius quo insumere possis?
Cur eget indignus quisquam te divite? quare
Templa Ruunt Antiqua Deum, cur improbe charæ
Non aliquid Patriæ tanto emetiris Acervo?
Horat. Serm. Lib II Sat. 2.

For, every Man whom God has blessed with *Abundance*, is God's *Steward* of that *Abundance*, and must *bestow* it according to the *Will* of his great *Lord*, for so St. *Peter*, in

in his firſt Epiſtle, *chap.* 4. *ver.* 10. *As every man has received the Gift, even ſo miniſter one to another, as good Stewards of the manifold Grace of God.* Now the Duty of a good Steward is thus repreſented in the 42d Verſe of this 12th of *Luke, Who then is that faithful and wiſe Steward whom his Lord ſhall make Ruler over his Houſhold to give them their portion of Meat in due Seaſon?* That is, to give the Family their Portion in due Seaſon, is the Duty of a Faithful and Good Steward. Now the Race of Mankind is God's great Family in the World, and ſome of the Members of this his Family he has made Choice of as his *Stewards* and *Purveyors* to provide for the reſt, and has accordingly entruſted them with ſuch a ſhare of his Revenue, to ſome more, to ſome leſs, as in his infinite Wiſdom he has thought moſt fit, aud order'd them to expend it to the Advantage of his Houſhold, that every one be provided for according to his Needs, and that no Man be ſuffer'd, as much as in them lies, to be miſerable and periſh: And this he requires ſhould be done *faithfully*, after a moderate Proviſion firſt made for themſelves and Relatives, as they ſhall anſwer it at that great Audit, when every Man muſt give Account of his Stewardſhip.

The Rich Man then in the Goſpel, being (as every other Rich Man is) God's *Steward*, to provide for ſuch as were in Neceſſity and *Want*, according to the *Abundance* God had given

given him, 'tis an easie Matter to answer the Question he propos'd to himself upon this great Increase, *What shall I do because I have no room where to lay my fruits?* Why, act like a *good Steward* for thy great Master, and let the Houses of the Poor be the Granaries for the Abundance of thine Increase. *Charity* to the *Necessitous* is the best Way of bestowing *Abundance*; and as many Ways as there are of expressing that Charity (which are innumerable) so many Ways are there of disposing of what is more than needful for our own comfortable Support. To Feed the Hungry, to give Drink to the Thirsty, Harbour to distressed Strangers, Cloaths to the Naked, Visits of Comfort and Relief to the Sick, and Freedom to Prisoners; to be a Father to the Fatherless, and a Husband to the Widow, and the like; this is to discharge a good Stewardship; this is what every Rich Man ought to do with his Abundance: And Blessed is that good Servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing; *Of a Truth*, saith our Lord, *his Master will make him Ruler over all that he hath*; he will commit still more of his Revenue to his Management, bless him with greater Prosperity and Increase, and at last he shall be received into the Joy of his Lord, and Reign with Christ his Great Master, in Glory for ever. Whoever therefore has *Abundance*, needs not much to perplex himself how he shall bestow it, for the *Poor are always with us*; and

for

for the Relief of *their Neceſſities*, not the Gratifying our own *Luxurious* Deſires, muſt God's *Extraordinary* Bleſſings be laid out.

Let us now, in the *Fourth* Place, conſider the great *Wiſdom* of not ſetting our Hearts upon, nor eagerly purſuing Riches, and diſpoſing of them as Religion directs, if it ſhall pleaſe God in an extraordinary Manner to bleſs us with them.

If Riches increaſe, ſet not your Heart upon them, is excellent Advice of the Royal Pſalmiſt, *Pſal.* 62. 10. and very true is that of St. *Paul* to *Timothy*, *Epheſ.* 1. 6, 10. that *while ſome have coveted after Mony, they have err'd from the Faith, and pierc'd themſelves through with divers Sorrows*; and that Godlineſs with Content is great gain; and therefore, wiſe indeed is that Man, that knows how to be content with his preſent Portion, and by ſetting his Affections upon more noble Objects, eſcapes the *Snare* of coveting after Wealth. He is free from the moſt *dangerous* Paſſion, the Love of Mony being the *root of all Evil*; and is ſecure of Quiet and Satisfaction amidſt all the Turns and Varieties of Fortune, the great Uncertainties of a falſe and fickle World: If *Poverty* ſhould become his Lot, he is *prepar'd* for't,; he knows there is no Stability in this World's Good, and therefore values it accordingly, and remembers that he has a much greater Treaſure in a better Place, of which none can deprive him, and which he ſhall enjoy

enjoy to *Eternity*, and upon *that* fixes his Affections, and longs for the Happy Time when he shall take *Possession* of it While he hath a plentiful Fortune, he acts like a good Steward of his great Lord, and enjoys the Comforts of it by letting those share with him that want a Supply, and thanks God that he is so blessed, as to *give* rather than *receive*; and in every respect makes the best use he can of what he has, to the Advancement of the Glory of his great Patron, and the Good of his Brethren; and then can sleep securely, though Dangers and Misfortunes threaten, if God thinks fit to *divert* them, and *continue* to him what he has, he knows he can do it; if not, he knows that all will end for the *best* at *last*, and so, chearfully resigns what God before had lent him: he is satisfied that *Happiness* does not consist in Abundance, and that a good Conscience is a continual Feast, and therefore, his main Endeavour is to preserve a good Conscience, a Soul clear and unspotted, and with *that* coarse Fare will relish well, and a homely Garment sit easie upon him; and such *Necessaries* as these, he that feeds the Ravens, and cloaths the Lillies, will surely provide for him. And he that is *thus* dispos'd, must needs be in perpetual Tranquility and Peace; and very *wise* consequently in taking that Course, which helps him to those inestimable Blessings.

As for the Wisdom of disposing of abundance (when God thinks fit to bless a Man with

with it) according to the Direction of Religion in the Relief of the Poor and Needy; there needs nothing more to recommend it to Chriſtians, than for them to read the latter Part of *Mat.* 25. where we are informed that the Expreſſes of Men's *Charity* ſhall at the great Day of Judgment be particularly enquired into, and the Charitable rewarded infinitely with Glory and Happineſs in Heaven; and the Uncharitable doom'd as accurſed Perſons to depart from God the Fountain of Bliſs, into Everlaſting Torments, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels. And, if ſo to direct our Steps in this World, as to avoid the Miſeries of Hell, and arrive at the unſpeakably Happy Kingdom of Heaven, be the greateſt *Wiſdom*, then is it the greateſt Wiſdom by a Charitable Diſpoſition of Men's Abundance to the Poor, to make Proviſion againſt that great Day of final Retribution, when Charity ſhall be ſo particularly enquired into, and ſo highly rewarded.

There remains nothing now to be done, but to urge what has been ſaid upon Mens Practice. We have ſeen in this Diſcourſe how great *Folly* 'tis eagerly to deſire and purſue *Abundance* of Wealth, that 'tis very uncertain whether ever ſuch Deſire ſhall be *gratified* or no, and that there is no *Satisfaction* in the *greateſt* Riches when *poſſeſſed*, and that they are often very ſuddenly loſt again, and then the Grief for being *depriv'd* of them will fill the Soul with

with abundantly greater *Trouble* than the *Enjoyment* of them did with *Pleasure*; and we have seen, as the *Folly*, so the *Vileness* of Covetousness, how much a Christian is debas'd by thus groveling on the Earth, and placing his Happiness in what *is* so much *beneath* him, and neglecting that which is the only proper Object of his Affections, and is of infinitely greater Value than all the Riches of Ten Thousand Worlds; we have seen likewise the *ill Consequences* of Covetousness, what a great *Hindrance* it is to, nay, *Destroyer* of Religion, how it indispose a Man for the Service of God, and endangers, more than any thing, his steady Adherence to the Truth; we have been directed to much better Ways of disposing our Abundance when we are blessed with it, than either in hoarding it up, or wasting it in Luxury and Excess; namely, in relieving the Necessities of the Poor, which will intitle us to the Reward of a good and faithful Steward, even the Eternal Joy of our dear Lord; and we have seen the great *Wisdom* of a *contented* Mind, the Blessedness of not *over-valuing* Riches, and the great Advantage that will be made by the *Charitable* Disposal of them, when Christ shall come to take Account of Mens Works at the great Day of Recompense. Wherefore, to conclude all in the excellent Exhortation of our Lord immediately after my Text; let none of us take Anxious and Perplexing *Thought for our Life,*

Life, what we ſhall eat; *nor for the Body, what we ſhall put on, for the Life is more than Meat, and the Body than Rayment, and* he that gave the Greater, will, no Queſtion, provide the Leſſer. Let us *conſider the Ravens, for they neither ſow nor reap, have neither Store-Houſe nor Barn, and God feedeth them*; *how much better are we than the Fowls*: *And which of us by taking thought, can add one Cubit unto his Stature*? *If we then be not able to do what is leaſt, why take we thought for the reſt*? Let us *conſider the Lillies, how they grow, they toil not, they ſpin not, and yet,* Solomon *in all his Glory, was not arrayed like one of theſe. If then, God ſo cloath the Graſs, which to Day is, and to Morrow is caſt into the Oven, how much more will he cloath us,* who very much betray our *little Faith* in doubting it?

Wherefore, let us not immoderately *ſeek what we ſhall eat, or what we ſhall drink, or wherewithall be cloathed, neither be of doubtful,* or anxious and too careful *Mind, for our Father knoweth that we have need of all theſe things*; *but ſeek ye firſt the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs, and all theſe things ſhall be added unto us,* in ſuch a Proportion as Infinite *Wiſdom* and *Goodneſs* knows to be *beſt* for us. Remembring, that as the Covetous Rich Fool in this Parable, that truſted in his Riches, and propos'd to himſelf much Happineſs from a Luxurious Enjoyment of them, was ſuddenly ſnatch'd from them to give Account of his Steward-

Stewardship; *so shall it be with every one that layeth up Treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.*

The PRAYER.

O *Eternal God, the great Creator and Governour of all things, and whose Wisdom and Goodness in all the Disposals of thy Providence is infinite; grant me the Wisdom to be contented with my present Lot, and satisfied with a moderate Proportion of this World's Good, and not to be too careful and solicitous in my Pursuit, even of that. For ever preserve me, I entreat thee, from the great Folly and Sin of Covetousness, and may I be so thoroughly convinced of the Uncertainty of Riches, both in the getting and the keeping, how unsatisfying they are when possess'd, and the many Snares and Temptations that attend them; as always to preserve a great Indifferency to them, and make it my chief Endeavour to attain the real Happiness of a contented Spirit. Grant that I may be more and more sensible how vile a thing it is to place my Felicity in what is so much beneath me as these Perishing Riches are, and which instead of improving me in what is really valuable, tend to betray me into many vile and hurtful Lusts, retard my Progress in Religion which is the one thing necessary, and too often lead into Apostacy from thy Truth. O Grant that I may act like a Man, and a Christian, and*

make

make it my chief Aim to be rich towards thee my God, and to lay up a Treaſure in Heaven; and if through thy Bountiful Goodneſs, Riches here increaſe, give me grace, I intreat thee, not to ſet my Heart upon them, but to diſpoſe of them ſo as may moſt conduce to thy Glory, and the Good of the Community; that making Friends with the Mammon of Unrighteouſneſs according to thy Bleſſed Will, when theſe fading Riches ſhall fail, and be left behind me, my Charity may procure for me a Reception into theſe Everlaſting Habitations, where I ſhall have a glorious Inheritance that fadeth not away; where neither Ruſt nor Moth doth corrupt, and where Thieves break not through and ſteal, and where my Happineſs ſhall be ineffable, fully ſatisfying and Eternal. Amen. *Bleſſed God,* Amen, Amen.

PARABLE X.

Of the Barren Fig-Tree.

Luke xiii. 6, 7, 8, 9.

A certain Man had a Fig-Tree planted in his Vineyard, and came and sought Fruit thereon, and found none.

Then said he to the Dresser of his Vineyard, Behold these Three Years, I come seeking Fruit on this Fig-Tree, and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground?

And he answering, said unto him, Lord let it alone this Year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it:

And if it bear Fruit well: And if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

THIS Parable was spoken upon the News that was brought to our Lord of the sad Fate of some Factious *Galileans*, whom *Pilate* the *Roman* Governour had set

ſet upon and deſtroy'd, mingling their Blood with the Sacrifices they were offering. To this, our Lord firſt made this Anſwer; *Suppoſe ye that thoſe* Galileans *were Sinners above all the* Galileans, *becauſe they ſuffered ſuch things? I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh. Or thoſe Eighteen, upon whom the Tower in* Siloam *fell and ſlew them* (another ſad accident that had lately happen'd) *think ye they were Sinners above all that dwelt in* Jeruſalem? *I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh.* And then he added this Parable, that he might further enforce the Neceſſity of a ſpeedy Repentance and Amendment of Life in all Men; in order to their eſcaping the Juſt *Judgment* of God in *this* World, and the *Eternal* Puniſhments of Sin in the *next*.

From what our Lord ſaid to his Diſciples upon the ſad Fate of the *Galileans*, and thoſe ſlain by the Tower in *Siloam*, *think ye that they were Sinners above all*, &c. we may, before we proceed to conſider the Parable, learn this ſhort, but excellent Leſſon; namely, That when ſudden ill Accidents befall our Neighbours, we do not preſently make Concluſion, as is too often done, (eſpecially where there has been any Enmity or Difference between the Parties) that God has met with them by his Judgments for ſome *Extraordinary* Wickedneſs of theirs, and pronounce them *worſe* Men then our ſelves, or others that *eſcape*, be-

cause they suffer such things; for this is a very *rash* and uncharitable Sentence, and may be far from *Truth*: But rather, by God's *Severity* upon others, be inclined to reflect upon our *selves*, and humble our selves before him for our *own* Iniquities; and entirely resolve to forsake every Evil Way, lest *we* likewise fall under the *like* Expresses of his Vengeance in this World, or of infinitely *worse* in that which is to come.

In the Parable it self, is represented God's Method of Proceeding with Sinners now under the Gospel from first to last; and it is this.

First, He plants them in his *Vineyard*, the Church of Christ; that there, by the good Cultivating of the Ministers of his Kingdom, and the refreshing Influences of his Blessed Spirit upon their Souls, they may become Fruitful of such good Works, as may fit and prepare them for the Enjoyments of his Heavenly Kingdom; to which in due season, they are to be *transplanted*. After they are thus plac'd in his *Vineyard*, and Cultivated by the Sermons of the Gospel, he looks for a proportionable Fruitfulness from them; and that after all his Care and Goodness to them, they would for their Part make him a due return of the Fruits of Evangelical Righteousness: As, when a Tree is remov'd from a Poorer to a Richer Soil, and much Care and Husbandry used about it, 'tis expected it should grow and flourish accordingly, and bring forth more

and

and better Fruit. After God has, with much Patience and Forbearance, yearly ſought for Fruit from them, and is as often diſappointed; his Wiſdom and his Juſtice prompt him to rid his Vineyard of the Incumbrance of thoſe Unprofitable Trees, to remove from the Society of his Faithful Diſciples, thoſe that are a Trouble and a *Scandal* to them; and as Barren Trees are laid aſide to be burnt, ſo to conſign them to thoſe everlaſting Burnings prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels. But, though in Juſtice he purpoſes the Deſtruction of the Unfruitful, yet his infinite Mercy, through the Interceſſion of the Compaſſionate Jeſus (the *Dreſſer* of this his Vineyard, the *Head* and *Governour* of the Chriſtian Church) inclines him to a ſtill farther Forbearance till they ſhall be cultivated and manur'd afreſh, by the again repeated Inſtructions and Exhortations of his Servants the Miniſters of the Goſpel, and the reiterated Motions of the Bleſſed Spirit of Life and Holineſs. And then, if they bear Fruit *well*, Happy will it be for them; but if not, after that he will *cut them down*, and utterly deſtroy them. Of each of theſe Particulars we ſhall now diſcourſe in their Order.

The *firſt* is, God's wondrous Care and Tenderneſs of Sinners in Planting them in his *Vineyard*, as the Parable expreſſes it; that is, receiving them into the Church of Chriſt, where they are cultivated by the Miniſters of his Kingdom, and their Souls water'd with gentle

gentle Showers from Above, the blessed Influences of the Holy Spirit, that they may Flourish and become Fruitful of such good Works as may prepare them for the Felicities of Heaven, to which in due time they shall be Transplanted.

Before the Coming of our Saviour, the *Jewish* Church was God's Vineyard, his peculiar Inclosure, and the Subject of his more immediate Care and Government; and all but the Seed of *Jacob* were excluded as wild uncultivated Trees, and left to Themselves in the Wilderness of the World: For so, in a spiritual Sense, was all but the Land of *Jewry*, the Lot of their Inheritance. Afterwards, when the Fullness of Time was come, that God would take Pity upon the whole Race of *Adam*, and receive all Mankind to his Favour; he then *enlarg'd* that his Vineyard, and gave a Free Admittance to all that would submit to the *Culture* and Government of his *Eternal Son*; whom he sent to break down the former Inclosure, and make it more *capacious*, even as large as the *World it self*, and committed it to his Management, made him the great *Dresser* of this Vineyard, the Head and Governour of this *Universal* Church; that through his excellent Directions, and the Care and Industry of his Servants, and the Dews from Above of his Divine Grace and Assistance: And above all, through the wondrous Efficacy of his *Precious Blood*, with which he plentifully

enrich'd

enrich'd this his new Plantation, it might thrive and flouriſh, and bring forth Fruit meet for him by whom it was dreſs'd, even the *Fruits of the Spirit*, and ſuch as are *meet for Repentance*, ſuch as may advance the Glory of God by the Salvation of innumerable Souls, that *none* made after his Image might *periſh*, but *all* come to *Everlaſting Life*.

God's Vineyard then being thus *enlarg'd*, and his Church now no longer confin'd to a *Corner* of the World, but by the Coming of Chriſt made *Univerſal*, that *all men might come to the Knowledge of Truth*; Man is again, as 'twere, ſeated in *Paradiſe*, and reconciled to God: 'Tis again put into his Power to continue in his Makers Favour, and after a Happy Life in this World, to be *tranſplanted* into that Heavenly Country, where is the Reſidence of the Divine Majeſty, and Rivers of ineffable Pleaſures which flow for evermore. As through the *Diſobedience* of the *firſt Adam* Mankind was driven out of Paradiſe, and doom'd to Live and Labour amongſt Briars and Thorns, as under the Diſpleaſure of his Creator, and then to Dye and Return to his Duſt; ſo through the *Obedience* of the *ſecond Adam*, even to the Death of the Croſs, through the Merits of his Blood, and the Atonement of his Sacrifice, all that ſad Sentence and Condemnation is, in a *Spiritual* Senſe, revers'd, and we are again planted in the Vineyard and Garden of God, recall'd from the Portion of Thorns

and Briars, and restor'd to the Favour of our Creator, and at length to change this Corruptible for Incorruptible, this Dishonour and Weakness for Glory and Power, this Natural for a Spiritual Body, this Mortal Life for Immortality; and by this means is brought to pass the Saying that is written, *Death is swallowed up in Victory.* 1 Cor. 15.

O Blessed Alteration! O happy Change of *Misery and Shame* for Happiness and Glory! O the Miraculous Love and Goodness of God to Mankind, in thus commiserating our deplorable Condition, and delivering us from the Power of Darkness, and translating us into the Kingdom of his Dear Son, and making us *meet* to be Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light! Happy are they who have heard of these Glad Tidings, and are planted in this Spiritual Vineyard, and under the Care and Cultivation of the great Dresser of it, *Christ Jesus*, who have such great Helps and Assistances to *bring forth fruit unto Holiness*, and consequently such full *Assurance of Hope*, that the *End will be Everlasting Life.* Heb. 6. 11.

Let them give Thanks from the Bottom of their Hearts, whom the Lord hath thus Redeem'd, and deliver'd from the Hand of the Infernal Enemy, and be telling of his Salvation from Day to Day: And let us of these Happy Islands, in the first place, magnifie him for this his Infinite Goodness; for none have had a greater share of it than we, none better

Planted

Planted nor better Cultivated, than the Members of this Church of *England*; and (which does much advance the Bleſſing) none were in a more ſad and *deplorable* Condition than the Inhabitants of theſe Iſlands before the Preaching of the Goſpel. And indeed, what the Prophet *Iſaiah* ſays of God's dealing with the *Jewiſh* Church, Iſa. 5. 4. which was then his Vineyard, may be very truly ſaid of his gracious Dealing with this our Church, *What could have been done more to his Vineyard that he hath not done in it? He hath planted it in a very fruitful Hill, and fenced it* by his Providence from the Incurſions of its Enemies, *and gather'd out the Stones thereof*, purg'd it from ſcandalous Hereſies and Superſtitions, which are Stones of Stumbling and Rocks of Offence, *and built a Tower in the midſt of it*, guarded it with the Civil Power, making Kings its Nurſing Fathers, and Queens its Nurſing Mothers, *and made a Wine preſs in it*, furniſh'd it with all Neceſſaries of Holy Inſtruction, and the Service of an Excellent Miniſtry, to inforce the great Truths of Religion, and lay all the Beauties and Excellencies of it before the People. And now, what could have been done more for this Church than the Lord has already done for it? And what an ineſtimable Happineſs is it that we enjoy, who were Born in this Church, early Conſecrated to God in Baptiſm, and thereby planted in this Vineyard, and fed with the ſincere and unmix'd

Milk

Milk of the Word, plainly and without Reserve, or the cunning Craftiness of Men that lye in wait to deceive: We are invited to a Frequent and *Entire* Reception of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, that great Conveyance of the Divine Grace and Aid, and have as many, and as moving Exhortations to live up to our Holy Profession, as are enjoy'd by any Part of the Christian World. What an inestimable Happiness is this! And what great Reason have we, as to bless God for this his unspeakable Goodness to us, so to bring forth the Fruits of Righteousness in great Abundance? 'Tis but Just and Right that we should do it, and God expects it from *All* that are planted in his Vineyard, much more from such as have had *extraordinary* Care and Cultivation bestow'd upon them, as we have had. For so, in the

Second Place, we find in this Parable, that the Owner of the Vineyard came to the *Fig Tree* he had planted in it, expecting Fruit from it.

The Fruit that God expects from Christians that have enjoy'd the Means of Grace and spiritual Improvement, is that which is call'd *Fruit meet for Repentance*, and the *Fruits of the Spirit*. Fruits meet for Repentance, are the Advances to a New and Spiritual Life, such as shall demonstrate a sincere Renovation and Change of Mind, a Turning from a Course of Rebellion against God, and Hatred of

of him, to entire Obedience to him, and hearty Love. But he that to the Profeſſion of Chriſtianity adds Debauchery of Manners, and inſtead of bringing forth the Fruits of the Spirit, ſuch as *Love, Joy, Peace, Long-Suffering, Gentleneſs, Goodneſs, Faith, Meekneſs, Temperance, and ſuch like*; Drudges in the *Works of the Fleſh*, ſuch as *Adultery, Fornication, Uncleanneſs, Laſciviouſneſs, Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Hereſies, Envyings, Murthers, Drunkenneſs*, and ſuch like, ſuch Men as theſe are, as St. *Jude* expreſſes it, *Trees, whoſe Fruit withereth, without Fruit, twice dead*, Jude 12. Or dead a ſecond Time after they were *enliven'd* by the Grace of Chriſt, and planted in his Vineyard, where they might have liv'd and flouriſh'd and brought forth much Fruit, well-pleaſing unto God; and by this their Barrenneſs, are as 'twere *pluck'd up by the Roots, and to whom is reſerv'd the Blackneſs of Darkneſs for ever, and whoſe End is to be burn'd.*

When our Lord, as he was returning from *Bethany* to *Jeruſalem*, ſaw a Fig-Tree at a Diſtance, very promiſing and full of Leaves, and went to it, expecting to find Fruit upon it; but finding nothing thereon but Leaves only, curs'd it, and ſaid unto it, let no Fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever; he plainly enough told the World, that the *Profeſſion* of Chriſtianity muſt always be attended with the Fruits of Piety, that he expects to find it ſo,

so, and will severely punish where he finds it otherwise. The Leaves of a Fig Tree are broad and strong, and hang thick, and are of a lovely Colour, and therefore very apt to represent the Profession of Christianity, which makes the fairest Appearance of any Religion that was ever taught the World, and the Title of a *Christian* does include all that can be supposed excellent and good in a Man. But, as the Fig-Tree, besides flourishing Leaves, bears a Delicious *Fruit*, and has always upon it Fruit coming to Maturity; so Christianity must not be all *Shew* and Profession, but the Fruits of Holiness must appear as well as the Leaves of Fair Speeches, and the outward Performance of some of the more Customary and Publick Duties of it; and, as is observ'd in the Fig-Tree, there must *always* be some Fruit growing to Ripeness and Perfection: God expects to find it so, and where he is disappointed, the Fate of the Barren Fig-Tree will be their Portion.'

We are all of us too apt with our first Parents, to cover our Spiritual Nakedness with Fig-leaves, and by tacking together a few External Observances of Religion, think to hide our Shame, and pass for good Servants and Disciples of the Lord Jesus: But this is too thin a covering to conceal our Vileness from his Eye, to whom all things lie Naked and open, and who knows the very Secrets of the Heart. He that is *indeed* a Follower of Christ,

Chriſt, and loves him in *Sincerity*, muſt walk as *he* walk'd, imitating his Example, and treading in his Bleſſed Steps, departing from all Iniquity, denying himſelf and all his vile Luſts and Affections, obeying chearfully the Holy Commands of his great Lord, and giving all diligence to add to his *Faith, Vertue, and to Vertue Knowledge, and to Knowledge Temperance, and to Temperance Patience, and to Patience Godlineſs, and to Godlineſs Brotherly Kindneſs, and to Brotherly Kindneſs Charity; for if theſe things be in us and abound, they make us that we ſhall be neither Barren nor Unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, 2 Pet. 1. 5. 6, 7, 8. And he only that has thus his *Fruit* unto *Holineſs*, ſhall in the *End* attain Everlaſting Life.

'Tis *Fruit* then, God expects from Chriſtians, not *Leaves*; not the *Form* of Godlineſs, but the *Power* of it; not to be call'd *Lord, Lord*, but to have his Commands *Obeyed*. But ſince God is infinitely *full* already, and can receive no Addition to his inexhauſtible Store; ſince our Goodneſs extendeth not to *him*, neither is it any Profit to him that we make our Way perfect: It will not be amiſs to enquire upon what Accounts God ſo ſtrictly and indiſpenſibly requires that we ſhould be Fruitful? And 'tis upon our *own* Account that we might be happy in *this* World, and made *capable* of enjoying the Glories and Felicities of the *Kingdom of Heaven*.

Firſt,

First, God expects the Fruits of Righteousness from all that name the Name of Jesus, and are planted in his Vineyard, that they may be happy in *this* World.

'Tis the great Design of our good God to make his Creatures *happy*; and because we are plac'd in *this* World to fit and *prepare* our selves for *Heaven*, and are to spend a Life here *below*; he has given us a *Rule*, which, if we walk by, we shall be happy *here* as well as in the world above; and which, if we disregard and deviate from, a *double* Misery will be our Portion. And in this God deals with us as a wise and good Parent with his Children; he keeps them close to what will conduce to their Happiness, though he *himself* receives no other Benefit by it, than the Hope of seeing his *Off-spring happy*.

'Tis for this Reason that our Saviour, the great Dresser of God's Vineyard, and his Servants, the Apostles, so often press the Observance of such Rules as have chiefly Relation to the Comfortable Living in *this* World; as with Relation to others, *Mercifulness, Charity, Meekness, Forbearance, and Forgiveness of Injuries, Peaceableness, Compassion and Pity*, together with exact *Justice and Honesty*; without which there would be no Comfort of *Society*; and Men would be like so many Wild Beasts, preying upon and devouring one another. And with Relation to our *selves*, we are taught *Temperance, and Sobriety, and Chastity*,

ſtity, and Moderation in all things, Contentment of Mind, Patience, and the like; without which, neither a Man's Mind or Body would be at Eaſe, nor taſte any Comfort and Happineſs in Life. Indeed, God has been pleas'd to annex the Rewards of *Heaven* to the ſincere and conſtant Practice of theſe Vertues, as a further *Encouragement* to Men chearfully and diligently to ſet about them; but 'tis the Happineſs of *this* World that they have a *direct* Influence upon, and are *therefore commanded,* and therefore *encourag'd,* that much Sin and Miſery might be prevented, and Men might be happy in this *lower* World.

For, as for the contrary *Vices,* as *Cruelty and Unmercifulneſs, Rage and Intemperate Anger, Uncharitableneſs and Revenge, Strife and Envy, Injuſtice and Oppreſſion,* and the like; theſe would make a Hell upon Earth, and quite deſtroy Society and all the Comforts of it, and make the World like a *Deſart,* and force Men to the Shelter of Rocks and Mountains, and Dens and Caves of the Earth: And where-ever *they* ſhould go, if *Intemperance* and ungovern'd *Luſt,* and Inordinate *Deſire* and *Uſe* of the Gratifications of *Senſe, Diſcontent* and *Anxiety of Mind, Impatience,* and the like, ſhould follow them; their Miſery would be *endleſs,* and Happineſs an utter *Stranger* to them.

And therefore, as much as the Happineſs of Life is to be valu'd, ſo much are we bound

to

to praise and adore the Infinite and *Disinterested* Goodness of God, who hath given us such Rules of Living as if *observ'd*, will *procure* that Happiness; and who besides, that we may not *fail* to observe them, has over and above propos'd to us ineffably Glorious Rewards in Heaven if we *do*, and threatned as great a Misery in Hell if we do *not*. That is, he has done all that is *possible* to be done to make a *free Agent* happy in the World that *now* is, as well as that which is to come; and therefore 'tis highly reasonable that we give all possible Praise and Thanksgiving to that his Infinite Goodness, and use all possible Diligence to *co-operate* with his Gracious Intentions for our Good; for 'tis *our* Happiness that will be promoted by it, not *his*. And this is the first Reason why God so *indispensibly* requires of us the *Fruits of Righteousness*, because 'tis impossible we should be happy even in *this* World without them.

A *second* Reason of this is, because otherwise 'tis impossible we should be happy in the *next* Life.

The Happiness of the next Life, we are well assur'd, consists in an intimate Vision and Enjoyment of *God*; who is the Fountain of Excellency and *Perfection*, and consequently of *Bliss*; and God being an infinitely Pure and *Holy* Being; and it being necessary to *Enjoyment*, that there should be a Correspondence and *Agreeableness* between the Object and the Faculty;

Faculty; no Soul but what is Pure and *Holy*, is *capable* of enjoying a Pure and *Holy God*.

The Soul therefore of every Man, being, ſince the Fall of *Adam*, ſtain'd and *polluted*, full of vile Affections and Luſts, ſuch as render it *uncapable* of ſo *pure* and *Divine* a Happineſs; 'tis neceſſary that it ſhould be refined and *purified*, and have Heavenly Affections and Deſires planted in the Room of thoſe Vile and Brutiſh ones, and recover the Divine Likeneſs which has been ſo ſhamefully *defac'd*, that ſo at length, by the Actual Exerciſe of the Divine Life *here*, we may become, in ſome Meaſure, *capable* of enjoying the Celeſtial Happineſs that flows from the Contemplation and Love of the *Supreme Good*. Or, in the Words of St. *John*, that being *like* him in this State of *Probation*, we may be *prepar'd* to *ſee him as he is*, in the Regions of Glory.

And this, an Obſervance of the Precepts of our Holy Religion will effect; and they were *therefore* given that they might effect it. We are exhorted to be *poor in Spirit*, *humble* and *reſign'd* to the Will of God, that ſo we may be conducted ſafely to the Kingdom of Heaven; *to hunger and thirſt after Righteouſneſs*, that we may be *fill'd* with *Grace* here, and *Glory* hereafter; to *mourn* for our former Vileneſs, and Degeneracy, and *Eſtrangement* from God, and flee from all Wickedneſs, and ſincerely endeavour a Reformation, that ſo we may be *comforted* in the Day of Retribu-

tion, and, as good and faithful Servants, be receiv'd into the *Joy of our Lord.* We are urg'd to *Purity of Heart* that we may *see God*, to be holy as he is holy, perfect as he is perfect, pure as he is pure, because he *hates* Iniquity, and into *his* Presence no *unclean* thing can enter, and without Holiness no Man *can* see the Lord. So that the Reason why God requires that we should *bring forth Fruit unto Holiness*, is, that the *end may be everlasting Life.* These are the Reasons why God so *strictly* and *indispensibly* requires that we should be fruitful of good Works, after he has planted us in his Vineyard, and cultivated us by his Blessed Son, and his Servants the Apostles, and their Successors, the Bishops, and other Inferiour Ministers of his Kingdom. *O that Men would therefore praise the Lord for his Goodness, and declare the Wonders that he doth for the Children of Men!* Psal. 107. 8.

The *third* thing this Parable informs us of, is God's *Long-Suffering* towards Sinners, and that, though he does indeed *expect* the Fruits of Righteousness from those that are planted in his Spiritual Vineyard, the Christian Church, yet he expects it with much Patience and *Forbearance*; and is not so extremely rigid as to punish for the *first* Disappointment he meets with, but waits still *further* to see if Time will work Amendment: And this is express'd in the Parable, by the Lord of the Vineyard, his coming *three Years* seeking Fruit on his Fig-Tree, and still finding none. Of

Of this *Long-Suffering* and Forbearance of God; every *Sinner* that is yet *alive* is an Argument. Which of the *best* of us have not been *less* fruitful than we *ought* to have been, and then God may with the greatest Reason expect from us, considering the Means of Improvement that we have enjoy'd; and this not only for *three* Years, but for three many times *repeated*? How *many* have been *wholly unfruitful*, and that for Scores of Years, notwithstanding all the Care and Cultivation of God's Ministers; and have been all the while in the Service of the great Adversary of God and Man, doing Despight to the Holy Spirit, Slaves to their vile Passions and Lusts, without Thought of Religion, and without God in the World: And yet, through God's Infinite Mercy and *Long Suffering*, are repriev'd from Destruction, and still in Possibility of Salvation, upon their intire *Repentance*, and bringing forth Fruits *meet* for it for the Future! As many Years as a Sinner has liv'd since he could discern between Good and Evil, so long has God expected Fruit from him, and so often been disappointed, and so long patiently *forborn* him; and considering how *hateful* Sin is to God, how highly provoking it is for his Creatures that have receiv'd their *Being* from him, and all the Blessings they have since enjoy'd; nay, for whom his only Son in wondrous Love shed his most Precious Blood, that he might purchase to himself a peculiar People,

zealous of good Works; and who have been so long planted in his Vineyard, and dress'd with the greatest Care and Tenderness, so that nothing on *God*'s Side is wanting to their Happiness; considering how provoking 'tis for Creatures, under such *strong* Obligations, to serve and obey him to the utmost of their Powers, obstinately and continually for so many Years to rebel against him: 'Tis indeed a Miracle of Divine *Forbearance* that any wilful Sinner is on this Side *Hell*. But, to our unspeakable Comfort, and our unspeakable *Shame* too, so it is; and still this is the Voice of the Father of Compassions, *Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil Ways, for why will ye die O House of Israel!*

'Tis indeed *of the Lord's Mercies only that we are not consum'd, and because his Compassions fail not, but are new every Morning*; but tho' to him *belong Mercies and Forgivenesses*, yet to *us* nothing but *Shame and Confusion of Face*; who have turn'd our Backs so long upon such Infinite Long-Suffering and Forbearance, and have refus'd to be intreated to our Happiness. But let us not be deceiv'd, God's Spirit will not *always* in this Manner strive with us; and he that still *despises the Riches of* this *his Goodness*, and is not by it *led to Repentance*, but *after his Hardness and Impenitent Heart, treasureth up to himself Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God, who will render to every Man according*

according to his Deeds. Rom. 2. 4, 5, 8. *Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguiſh,* ſhall at length (as *ſlowly* as it moves) certainly overtake him, and cruſh him into Ruin.

For ſo, in the next Place we are told in this Parable, That when the Lord of the Vineyard had long expected Fruit from his Fig-Tree, and ſtill found none; he ſaid, *Cut it down, why cumbreth it the Ground?*

And indeed, God's *Forbearance* and Long-Suffering of Sinners, is ſo far from being an Encouragement to them to go on ſtill in their Wickedneſs; that, if they rightly conſider it, 'tis a prevailing Motive to a ſpeedy and ſincere *Repentance.* For *Forbearance* does imply a preceding *Guilt* and Obnoxiouſneſs to *Puniſhment,* which, though *reſpited* for a Time, is not wholly *remitted*; but if it be ineffectual to the *Reformation* of the Sinner, will be at length pour'd down in full Meaſure upon his Head. And therefore, when a wicked Man reflects upon his evil Courſe of Life, and withall ſees himſelf as yet *forborn* by the Offended Majeſty of Heaven, and that he lives as ſecurely as better Men; if his Luſts have not quite blinded his Reaſon, he muſt needs conclude that this Forbearance of ſo *Juſt* and *Holy* a God, who infinitely *hates* Iniquity, and is reſolv'd to puniſh it, and has declar'd that he will not *finally* ſpare the guilty; is only in order to his *Amendment,* that ſo he may have Time to *review* the Actions of his paſt Life, and attend

to the Miserable Consequences of them, and so be inclin'd to *return* to that Obedience to God which hitherto he has so shamefully neglected; because, if he still persists in his Rebellion against his Maker, and is Incorrigible, *Mercy* shall be turn'd into *Judgment*, Destruction shall overtake him like an armed Man, and he shall not escape.

The Divine Justice in this Case may be compar'd to the Course of a *River*; it may be damm'd up and its Progress hindred for a Time; but unless its Stream be *diverted* some other Way, 'twill swell till at last it bear down the Obstacle, and rush on with greater Violence for being interrupted in its Way: So here, the great Benignity and Compassion of God's Nature may sometimes interpose between the Stroke of Justice, and the wretched Offender, to see if he will repent and do no more wickedly, that so the Divine *Nemesis* may steer another Course; but if all this prove at length to no Purpose, if the Man *refuse to return and seek after God*, he will whet his *Sword and make ready his Arrows against the Face of him*, Vengeance shall then have its *free Course*, and Torrents of God's enflam'd Anger shall overwhelm his Soul for ever. There are many Places in Scripture to this Purpose, and which are so obvious to every Attentive Reader, that they need not be here recited: And truly, *irreclaimable* Sinners are so great a Dishonour to God, and Disparagement to Religion,

gion, and like a Contagious *Peſt* to Society, that they deſerve to be remov'd to a Place more proper for them, the Habitations of the Devil and his Angels.

But ſtill the Compaſſionate Jeſus is our Interceſſor; and when, after God's long *abus'd* Forbearance Juſtice is ready to ſtrike, he pleads in Virtue of his Blood for a ſtill *longer Reprieve*. Hoping that at length the Sinner may be awaken'd by the Sermons of the Goſpel, and the inward Motions and Excitations of the Spirit of Life and Holineſs, and *ſee* and *fear* his Danger and return by Repentance, and do no more wickedly. For ſo in the next place 'tis ſaid in the *Parable*, that when the Lord of the Vineyard gave Order that the Barren Fig-Tree ſhould be *cut down*, the *Dreſſer* of the Vineyard, by whom our *Saviour* is repreſented, *anſwering, ſaid unto him, let it alone this Year alſo, till I ſhall dig about it and dung it.*

Chriſt is our *merciful and faithful High-Prieſt in things pertaining to God, to make Reconciliation for the Sins of the People, for he knows our Infirmities, and in that he himſelf hath ſuffered being tempted, he is able alſo to ſuccour thoſe that are tempted, and ever liveth to make Interceſſion for us.* Heb. 2. 17, 18. Heb. 7. 25. He moves for a ſtill *longer Reſpite*, and promiſes to uſe new Methods that we may become fruitful of ſuch good Works, as will be well-pleaſing in his Father's Sight, and accordingly cultivates and manures our Souls

with *repeated* Exhortations to Repentance, presses the Discourses of his Ministers still more *home* upon Men's Consciences, and gives new Aids and Assistances of his Blessed Spirit; provides new Happy Circumstances by his Providence for our Good, such as a Faithful *Instructer*, Good *Conversation* and *Example*, Pious *Books* and Discourses which may warm and enliven a Sense of Religion in the Soul, and awaken Attention, and soften the Heart of Stone, and render it penetrable by the Arguments of the Gospel, and receptive of the Blessed Impressions of the Spirit of God: That, as loosening the Mould about the Roots of a Tree, and cherishing it with the kindly warmth of Dung, is very conducive to the spreading of its Fibres, and making it flourish and grow fruitful; so, these gracious Methods of the great Dresser of God's spiritual Vineyard, Christ Jesus, may so influence the Souls of Christians, as to make them bear much Fruit, to the Glory of God, and their own everlasting Salvation.

This is the *last* Course that can be taken for a Sinner's Safety; and if this will not prevail with him to take care of his Happiness, there is no longer Hope. 'Tis like the Intercession of a Favourite for a Condemn'd Criminal, upon Condition of his better Conversation for the future; but if he again returns to his old vile Courses, his Friends then abandon him, as one that *deserves* to perish. And so here in the

Parable,

Parable, Chriſt the Beloved Son of God intercedes for a miſerable Sinner ready for Deſtruction, and begs a *Reprieve* for him, to ſee if Time and farther Care, will cure his Wickedneſs; but if *this* proves ineffectual, there remains nothing but *a fearful Expectation of Judgment and fiery Indignation.* His *Interceſſor* will *then* give him over for *Deſperate*, and ſuffer Juſtice to take its Courſe; for ſo ſaid the Dreſſer of the Vineyard to his Lord, *If after I have digg'd about it, and dung'd it, it bear fruit well; but if not, then after that thou ſhalt cut it down.*

And *this*, in the *laſt* Place, repreſents to us the *deplorable* Condition of ſuch, as after all the Methods of Grace for their Reformation, are ſtill *hardned* in their Wickedneſs; Chriſt will no more appear in their Behalf, no more Thought ſhall be taken for their Safety, but their *Compaſſionate Interceſſor* ſhall then become their *ſtern* and inexorable *Judge.*

And, when the dreadful Day of Doom ſhall come, and the miſerable Wretches appear before his Throne, to receive the juſt Recompence of their obſtinate Impieties; then ſhall *That Jeſus* who once ſo earneſtly pleaded with God in their *Behalf*, pronounce the Dreadful Sentence, *Depart from me ye Curſed into Everlaſting Fire.* Depart from me your *Saviour*, and *once* compaſſionate *Mediator* between God and You; Be from henceforth and for ever depriv'd of all *Hope* of *Redemption* and Reinſtatement

statement into the Favour of my Father; Be banish'd for ever from all Intercourse with *Heaven*, without any *Intercessor*, any *Propitiatory Sacrifice*, any *Advocate* to plead your Cause, and without any Place for *Repentance* to Eternal Ages: Depart to the Regions of Endless *Horror* and *Despair*, in the Society of the *Devil* and *his Angels*. And this is but the just Demerit of your *Obstinate Wickedness*, who *despis'd the Goodness of God that should have led you to Repentance*.

This is the sad End of *Irreclaimable* Sinners; this is the Punishment of an *unfruitful* Profession of Christianity: Wherefore, let those consider this that forget God, before it be too *late*, lest he pluck them away, and there be none to deliver them; Let them no longer turn the Grace and *Forbearance* of God into *Lasciviousness*, but work out their Salvation with *Fear* and *Trembling*. For God is *just* as well as *merciful*; and though *slow to Wrath, and of great Goodness, repenting him of the Evil*, yet he will *by no means clear the* obstinately *guilty*, but to such is a *Consuming Fire*.

The PRAYER.

I.

O *Merciful God, who hast planted me in the Vineyard of thy dear Son, the Christian Church; and by the Culture of thy Ministers, and*

and the enlivening Influences of thy Blessed Spirit, hast taken tender Care of my Growth, and that I thrive and flourish in all spiritual Excellencies till I be fit to be transplanted to thy Heavenly Paradise; I bless thy infinite Goodness for the Enlargement of this thy Vineyard, so as to extend even to us, though so remote from thy first Plantation; and for those extraordinary Helps we of this Church have, in order to our Increase in all the Fruits of the Spirit: And earnestly beg, that we may not produce Leaves only, the mock Appearances of Christian Vertue, but the Fruit of a sincere Religion, in all the Instances of Holy Conversation.

II.

I acknowledge, with Admiration at thy infinite Love to Mankind, that 'tis Our *Happiness thou respectest, in thus indispensibly requiring Fruit of us, not any Acquisition to thy self, who art infinitely full already, and the overflowing Fountain of all possible Good: Thou commandest that our Fruit should be unto Holiness, because we shall otherwise be incapable of the blessed End of our Hopes of Eternal Life, and spend our Days too in Misery in this Lower World. O Lord, as is thy Majesty, so is thy Mercy! O make me duely sensible of thy tender Care of my Happiness, and may it never, through my wretched Obstinacy, be in vain! And in vain would it be, were not thy long-suffering wonderful. With what amazing Patience dost thou wait to see if at length I shall be fruitful! How often have I disappointed thy just*

just Expectations, and yet thou hast still forborn me through thine own Compassions and the Intercession of my dear Redeemer, the Dresser of thy Vineyard, who hath ply'd me with new Methods of Conversion, fresh Applications to invigorate my Piety, that at the last I may return thee acceptable Fruits, and escape the sad Punishment that is due to Barrenness. Thou hast done all, O blessed God, that can be done to secure the Happiness of Rational and Free Agents: I therefore beg, with all the Earnestness of an awaken'd Soul, that thy Goodness, Long-suffering, and Forbearance, may soften my Spirit, and lead me to Repentance, and melt me into Shame, and Tears of Penitential Sorrow, for having so long abus'd the tender Kindness of so good a God. O let not thy Lenity ever extinguish the Dread of thy Vengeance, which though slow is sure; and may I seriously consider, that if this thy Mercy is not effectual to my Reformation, 'twill but add weight to the Eternal Ruin I deserve May these Considerations, most gracious God, never depart from my Mind till Fruit be added to my Leaves, and I experience the Power *of True Godliness; which if thou wilt grant me, then will I praise thee without ceasing, and magnifie thy Goodness for ever and ever.* Amen. Amen.

PARABLE

PARABLE XI.

Of the Prodigal Son.

Luke xv. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24.

And Jeſus ſaid, a certain Man had two Sons:
And the younger of them ſaid to his Father, Father, give me the portion of Goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his Living.
And not many days after, the younger Son gather'd all together, and took his Journey into a far Country, and there waſted his Subſtance in riotous Living.
And when he had ſpent all, there aroſe a mighty Famine in that Land; and he began to be in want.
And he went and joyned himſelf to a Citizen of that Country, and he ſent him into his Fields to feed Swine.
And he would fain have filled his Belly with the Husks that the Swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. *And*

And when he came to himself, he said, How many Hired Servants of my Fathers have Bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with Hunger!

I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee,

And am no more worthy to be called thy Son, make me as one of thy Hired Servants.

And he arose and came to his Father. But when he was yet a great way off, his Father saw him, and had Compassion, and ran, and fell on his Neck, and kissed him.

And the Son said unto him, Father. I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son.

But the Father said to his Servants, bring forth the best Robe, and put it on him, and put a Ring on his Hand, and Shooes on his Feet.

And bring hither the fatted Calf and kill it, and and let us eat and be merry.

For this my Son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

THIS whole Chapter, from the Third Verse to the End, is intended to represent the great Tenderness and *Compassion* of God towards Sinners; his great Desire that they should *Repent*, and turn from their wicked Courses; and how highly pleasing to him it is, when they sincerely do so. And this is express'd in Three Parables; The

The firſt, of a Man's ſeeking diligently a Sheep that he had loſt, and leaving the reſt of his Flock till he had found it; and then rejoycing greatly, and telling his Neighbours the good News, and inviting them to partake of his Joy. The Second is, of a Woman's having loſt a Piece of Silver, and ſeeking very carefully till ſhe had found it; and then, in like manner, rejoycing with her Friends for *her* good Succeſs. And the Third Parable is, that of the *Prodigal Son*: And becauſe they are All to the ſame purpoſe, 'twill be ſufficient to diſcourſe of *One* of them only; and the *Laſt* being the moſt *full* and *comprehenſive*, I ſhall conſider *That*.

The Occaſion of Our Lord's ſpeaking theſe Parables, was, The *Scribes* and *Phariſees* finding fault with him for Inſtructing and Converſing with *Publicans* and *Sinners*; for they look'd upon it as very ſcandalous, and a kind of *Pollution*, to have any Familiarity with thoſe *worſt* of Men, as they thought them, and murmur'd againſt our Saviour, ſaying, *This Man receiveth Sinners, and eateth with them*, verſe 2. To this Objection of theirs againſt him, he anſwers in the Parables before mention'd, and ſhews, how unreaſonably uncharitable they were, to think much of his Teaching and Converſing with thoſe, who *becauſe* the vileſt of Men, had therefore the moſt *Need* of his Holy Inſtructions and excellent Example,

ample, that they might be reform'd and Reclaim'd from their Wicked Practices. For, as he said elsewhere, the *Whole* have no need of a Physician, but those that are *Sick*; and therefore he came to Seek and to Save those that were *lost*, and *Not to call the Righteous but Sinners to Repentance.* Nay more, he tells them in the 7th and 10th Verses of this Chapter, that *There shall be more Joy in Heaven, in the Presence of the Angels of God, over One Sinner that Repenteth, than over Ninety and Nine Just Persons that need no Repentance*; or such a *Total* Change of Mind as is in a Sinner that *breaks off* his vile Courses by Repentance. And farther to explain and enforce this great and most comfortable Truth, and represent it more lively to their Apprehensions, he spake the Parable of the *Prodigal Son*; and therein, very naturally and movingly, expresses these *four* Things.

First, The great *Extravagancy* of Wicked Men, when they give themselves up to the Conduct of their *own* Wills and Affections, and are weary of the Government of God their Heavenly Father.

Secondly, The *sad* Condition such Men quickly reduce themselves to by that their Extravagancy and loose self-will'd Course of Life, or in other Words, the miserable Consequences of Debauchery and Riot.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, The ſharp *Remorſe* of *Conſcience* that attends ſuch Courſes, the Shame and Sorrow for them, and the Reſolutions of an *awaken'd* Sinner to return again to his Obedience to God. And

Fourthly, The great *Tenderneſs* and *Compaſſion* of the Father of Spirits to ſuch as Repent in *earneſt*, and *keep* their Reſolutions; His Readineſs to receive them again to his Favour, and great Joy for their Return, *Becauſe they were dead but are alive again, were loſt but are found* Which laſt Particular is the *Reaſon* of the *greater* Joy that is in Heaven over one *Sinner* that *Repenteth*, than over Ninety and Nine *Juſt* Perſons that *need* no Repentance; and is a very ſatisfactory Account of our Lord's ſo often Converſing with and Inſtructing *Publicans* and *Sinners*: For they had the moſt *need* of that great Phyſician of Souls, and conſequently *their* Salvation would cauſe the *greateſt* Joy in Heaven; and therefore our Compaſſionate Saviour ſo induſtriouſly endeavour'd their *Converſion*. And, had the *Phariſees* had any of that Goodneſs in them they ſo much *pretended* to, they would have *rejoyced* at our Lord's Charity, and *admir'd* and *lov'd* him for it, rather than have *murmur'd* at it as they did, and uſed it as an *Objection* againſt him.

The *firſt* Thing expreſs'd in this Parable is the great *Extravagancy* of wicked Men when they give themſelves up to the Guidance of

their own Wills and Affections, and are weary of the Government of God their Heavenly Father. 'Tis represented here, by a Prodigal Young-Man's leaving his Father and rambling into a far Country, and there wasting his Substance with *Riotous Living*.

Impatience of Government and *Restraint*, and a Desire of being *Free*, and at Liberty to follow their own Inclinations and Propensions; is that which first prompts Men, with the young Prodigal in the Parable, to leave their Heavenly Father, and get as far from his Government as they can; and when they have laid aside the Thoughts of *Religion*, then to take their Swing, and do what seems good in their own Eyes. And with this *fancied* Liberty they are at *first* mightily *pleas'd*, and wish it could be *always* so; that is, that there were no *God*, or no *Religion* to awe and *confine* their Desires; but that they might be a Law unto themselves, and their own Will the sole Measure of their Actions: For so the Foolish Young-Man in the Parable, we read could not be satisfied till he had his Fortune in his own Hands, to dispose of as he listed; *Father, give me the portion of Goods that belongeth to me*; and as soon as he had it, he got as far from his Father as he could, and then, denied not his Soul whatever it desired, or as the Parable hath it, *Not many days after, the younger Son gather'd all together, and took his journey into a far Country, and there wasted his Substance with Riotous Living*. And

And juſt ſo it is with a Sinner. He finds *Religion* will oblige him to a *ſerious* and circumſpect Converſation, and that if he continues in the Family of the Faithful, he muſt live *ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent World*, and *deny* his Bodily Appetites and Deſires, and keep them under Subjection to the Spirit; and imitate the Excellencies of his Heavenly Father, *be holy, pure, and perfect, as he is*, becauſe he abominates Iniquity, and into his Preſence no unclean Thing can enter. But theſe are *hard* Sayings; this is a Servitude that he looks upon as *unſufferable*; and he has (as he thinks) a much eaſier and pleaſanter way of Living in his Eye, and which he *longs* to experience; and therefore reſolves, once for all, to ſhake off the galling Yoke of Religion, and get as far from the Government of his Divine Parent as he can, and become his own Maſter; and then he thinks he ſhall be happy. So blinded are Sinners by the Deceitfulneſs of Sin, as to ſhun Happineſs and embrace Ruin; to look upon the *Glorious Liberty of the Sons of God* as the greateſt *Slavery*, and exchange it for the vile Drudgery of Vice; to run from that Bleſſed Being who is the Fountain of Perfection and Happineſs, and inſiſt in the Track that leads to Eternal Ruin! An unfortunate End is always the conſequence of lawleſs Liberty; and as a Ship without a Helm or Governour, inſtead of arriving at the Haven, is ſoon ſplit upon Rocks, or

over-whelm'd with Quicksands; such is the Case of a Sinner, that impatient of the gentle Restraints of Religion, is resolved to quit it, and take his own Course.

But why should Men be so weary of the Government of God, and desire so earnestly to be at their own Disposal? Is not Religion the most *Reasonable* Service? And should it not be the greatest Pleasure to a Rational Creature to act according to the best Reason? Is not God the *wisest*, the most *powerful*, and the most kind and *indulgent* Being too? And is it not more eligible to be *govern'd* by infinite *Wisdom*, and *directed* in the right Track to *Happiness* by infinite *Goodness*, and *shielded* from Dangers by infinite *Power*; than to be hurried on by the blind Force of brutish and unruly Passions to our Unhappiness and Destruction, and expose our selves to all the Malice of Hell, by yielding to the Temptations of the Devil, and forfeiting the Protection of the Almighty? Certainly, if Men would but *consider*, instead of desiring with the Prodigal Son, to be free from the Government of this our Heavenly Father, and to take their *own* Course at a *Distance* from him; they would say with Holy *David*, *One Day in thy Courts is better than a Thousand, I had rather be a Door-keeper in the House of my God, than to dwell in the Tents of Ungodliness*; and confess in the Words of our Church, that his Service is perfect Freedom. And the silly young Prodigal

digal in the Parable ſoon found by a coſtly Experience, the Difference between living under the mild and prudent Government of his Father, and being left to the Conduct of his own ill inſtructed and *green* Head. But before I proceed to this Conſideration, I ſhall briefly ſhew how fitly *Vice* is repreſented by *Prodigality*.

Prodigality, in the Words of this Parable, is *waſting a Man's Subſtance* or Eſtate, *in riotous* or profuſe and extravagant *Living*; or without any Regard to the *future*, ſquandring away what he has in exceſſive Luxury: And therefore a wicked Man is certainly the *greateſt Prodigal* in the World, becauſe he *waſtes* and deſtroys what is of the greateſt *Value* and Eſteem, and that in the moſt *profligate* Manner, without any thought of what ſhall be *hereafter*, only that he may gratifie his preſent Appetites and Deſires. For,

Firſt, Nothing is a more *ſubſtantial* Good, and more to be priz'd and carefully *preſerv'd* than the *Grace of God*, or thoſe Bleſſed Motions and Inſpirations of the Holy Spirit, whereby Men are inwardly inclin'd to *purſue* what will make for their Eternal *Happineſs*, and *diſſwaded* from, and warned to *avoid* what will bring them to endleſs Ruine. Now this *Grace of God* a Sinner turns into *Laſciviouſneſs*; deſpiſes and neglects, nay *reſiſts* the Motions of the Spirit of Life and Holineſs, and cloſes with the Temptations and Suggeſtions of the

Spirit of Vileness and Impurity; and does this so *continually* and with so much *Obstinacy*, that he daily wastes that inestimable Treasure, and more and more grieves that Blessed Spirit, and forces him to withdraw his Influences, till at length they are quite *extinguish'd* in his Soul, and a desperate spiritual *Poverty* succeed, an utter *Want* of that Divine Grace, which he so profligately wasted when he had it. And no Poverty certainly so miserable as that which will starve and famish the *Soul*, and bring it to *Eternal Death*; and therefore no Prodigality like that which squanders away that which is the only Nourishment of the Spiritual Life: Especially if we consider for *what* it is that a Sinner is thus prodigal of so great a Treasure, namely, the gratifying a few Brutish Lusts, and the acting such Vices as bring no true *Satisfaction* along with them, but are full of *Vexation* and *Disappointment* in *this* World, and will at last sink the Soul into the lowest Hell.

Secondly, *Time* is likewise a very substantial Good, and highly to be valu'd, and carefully improv'd, because 'tis the only Opportunity we have of securing our main Interest, the Happiness of *Eternity*; and when *Time* shall be at an *End*, that is, to every *particular* Person when Death shall put a Period to this Life, then comes that Night in which no Man can work, then the Opportunity shall be for ever at an End, and according as Men have

have improv'd or waſted their *Time* in *this* World, ſo ſhall their *Eternity* be *happy* or *miſerable* in the *next*. And therefore, he is indeed very fooliſhly prodigal, who without any Thought of hereafter, waſtes this precious Treaſure, this only Opportunity of making himſelf for ever happy, in *Vanity* and *Folly*, in pleaſing and humouring his Body, and neglects the Improvement of his Soul; and inſtead of *working out his Salvation with fear and trembling*, ſecures to himſelf Eternal *Miſery*. And this does every wilful Sinner, when, with the Prodigal in the Parable, he waſtes this his Subſtance in Luxurious and Riotous Living, and ſtudies nothing but how to gratifie the *lower* Life, looking no further than this preſent World for Happineſ, 'till his Opportunity be quite loſt, and he is ſurpriz'd into an unchangeably Miſerable Condition, becauſe when 'twas put into his hand to make himſelf *happy* if he *would*, he neglected it, and choſe the Track to *Ruin*.

Thirdly, The Glorious Reverſion of our *Heavenly Inheritance*, is a Treaſure likewiſe that can never be ſufficiently valu'd; *for Eye hath not ſeen, nor Ear heard, neither can it enter into the Heart of Man to conceive*, the Felicities and Glories of it. Now this, we are aſſur'd by him that cannot *lie*, and whoſe it is to *beſtow*, ſhall be the Reward of *Vertue* and ſincere Religion; all this is laid up for them that love God and keep his Commandments.

And therefore, for a Man that knows all this to be so, prodigally to throw away all Expectation of, and Title to such a Reversion as this, upon such low and profligate Accounts as the wallowing in the filthy Pleasures of a Goat or a Swine, or the heaping up Treasures of Gold and Silver which are as *unsatisfying* as they are *uncertain* and *perishing*, or for the Sake of a little empty Honour, or the like: This is the very Highth of profligate Extravagancy, and such, as one would think, no sensible Man should ever be guilty of.

Upon these and many other, nay, indeed *all* Accounts, 'tis very true that a wicked Man is the greatest Prodigal in the World; for he wastes and throws away what is of highest Value to a Man; and that, for what is no better than *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*.

And thus much for the *first thing* express'd in this Parable, *viz.* the great *Extravagancy* of ungodly Men, when they give themselves up to the Guidance of their *own* Wills and Affections, and grow weary of the Government of *God* their Heavenly Father: Like the Prodigal Son, they *waste* their most precious *Substance*, in *riotous and profligate living*.

The *second* thing express'd in this Parable, is the *sad Condition* such Men soon reduce themselves to by that their Extravagancy and loose self-will'd Course of Life; or in other Words, the Miserable *Consequences* of Debauchery and Riot, and of following so *Blind* a Guide

Guide as Mens unruly Paſſions and Luſts. For ſo in the Parable, when the Prodigal Young Man had *ſpent all, there aroſe a mighty Famine in that Land, and he began to be in Want, and went and joyn'd himſelf to a Citizen of that Country, who ſent him into his Fields to feed Swine: And he would fain have fill'd his Belly with the Husks that the Swine did eat, but no Man gave unto him.*

The *firſt* ill Conſequence then of this *Prodigality* or Lawleſs Extravagant Living, is Spiritual *Want*, or a Scarcity and *Famine* of the Divine *Grace* in the *Soul*; which is by ſo much more to be dreaded than a Famine of Proviſions for the *Body*, as *Eternal* Miſery and Death is more terrible than *Temporal* The Grace of God, is queſtionleſs the Nouriſhment of the Divine Life; and which, if once withdrawn, will leave the Soul *dead in Treſpaſſes and Sins:* Now an obſtinate Courſe of Diſobedience to the Divine Will, drives out that Life-giving Power, and makes the Soul *uncapable* of Vital Union with ſo pure a Spirit; and, as a Humane Soul is *forc'd* to leave a Body rotten and *waſted*, and unapt any longer to *entertain* it, ſo this *Divine Spirit* is *thruſt* out from a *corrupted* ſinful *Soul*. And conſequently, there muſt be a *famine* in that Soul of that Heavenly *Bread* which is abſolutely *neceſſary* to eternal *Life*; and the Conſequence of that is Eternal *Death*.

And

And certainly, no Man that considers what a Dismal Condition that Soul is in, which is reduced to such *Extremity* of Spiritual Want as this; how full of Horrour and Despair as doom'd to endless Misery, and *seal'd* up to Destruction, which she sees dayly nearer and nearer approaching, and *no* way to *escape*, but (like a Wretch immur'd between two Walls, there to be starv'd to Death) in continual Expectation of her sad End: No Man that considers this, with that Seriousness he ought, but will be very careful not to *waste* what is so *necessary* to his Spiritual *Subsistence*; *i. e.* by no means grieve, or resist, or quench that Life-giving Spirit, by whom all true Religion *lives, and moves and hath its Being*, and which if neglected and oppos'd will be *withdrawn*, and that perhaps for *ever*. If like *Esau*, we sell this inestimable *Blessing* for a Mess of *Pottage*, forfeit the Food of our Souls that we may indulge our Sensual Appetites, that we may fear that a Spiritual *Famine* will be our Punishment, and no place left for Repentance, no Blessing remaining for us, though we seek it *earnestly with Tears*. As the Prodigal in the Parable, when, after he had wasted his Substance in riotous Living, and then *wanted*, and was ready to perish with Hunger, so that he would have been glad of the meanest and coarsest Fare, would fain have fill'd his Belly with the *Husks that the Swine did eat*; even *that* he could not obtain, for *no Man*, says the Parable *gave unto him*.

Another

Another ill Conſequence of this Spiritual Prodigality, and looſe wicked Courſe of Life (and to name no more amongſt a numerous Train of them) is, that it extremely degrades and *debaſes* a Man, and engages him in the *vileſt* Drudgery imaginable, the ſerving *Beſtial Luſts*, and *Deviliſh Paſſions*. This is expreſs'd in the Parable by the *Prodigal*'s being ſent into the Fields to *feed Swine*; a thing the moſt *abject* in it *ſelf*, and the moſt deteſtable to the *Jews* (to whom our Lord ſpake the Parable) who were taught by their Law to eſteem that Creature among the moſt *unclean*. And as low or *lower* than this does he debaſe his Nature, who, neglecting the *Noble* Precepts of *Religion*, makes his *Senſual* Appetite the Rule and Meaſure of his Actions. For what more *Beaſtly* and Deteſtable than *ungovern'd Luſt*? The wretch himſelf that is guilty of it is aſham'd *publickly* to commit it, and takes Advantage of Holes and Corners, and the Night to hide his abominable Wickedneſs, and his own *Bluſhes* that attend the Commiſſion of it.

What puts a Man upon more pitiful and *unmanly* Shifts to attain his Deſire? What ſneaking and cringing to a baſe Strumpet, and her baſer Servants, before Acceſs can be had to a Neighbours Bed, or a Virgin Innocence defil'd?

And as much may be ſaid of the Shame of *Drunkenneſs*, that *Swiniſh* Vice, which makes a Man more vile and deſpicable than the foul-

eſt

est of Brutes. 'Tis a Vice every Way odious and unmanly, and full of the most detestable Consequences, and branded with the *basest* Character, even by *Infidels*: And so of all other Sensual Vices, the Shame and Baseness is notorious.

Those *Devilish Passions* likewise, to which Men become subject that throw off the Government of Religion, such as *Pride, Vain-Glory and Hypocrisy, Envy, Hatred and Malice*, and such like; do greatly defile our excellent Nature, and are the greatest Disparagement to those that suffer their Minds to be infested with them; as would be soon apparent, could we but perswade them to so much Seriousness as to recollect with themselves how odious these Vices have appear'd when they have met with them in *other* Men. And if they look so ill in *others*, certainly no Man can be so besotted as to think them *amiable* Qualifications in *himself*; but must confess, that whoever is so foolishly prodigal as to waste and squander away what is of *real* Excellency, as *Vertue* is in the Eyes of all Men, and gives himself up to such Devilish Passions as those before mention'd, and the Service of such vile Lusts; Debases himself much lower than that vile Office of serving the vilest of Brutes. Great Reason therefore have such Men seriously to bethink themselves, and attend to the Remorse of their Consciences, which goes along with such Courses, and being once awaken'd

waken'd reſolve to return again to their Obedience to God. Which is the

Third thing expreſs'd in this Parable, by the Prodigal Son's *coming to himſelf*, and thus reaſoning. *How many hired Servants of my Father's have Bread enough and to ſpare, and I periſh with Hunger! I will ariſe and go to my Father, and will ſay unto him, Father, I have ſinned againſt Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be call'd thy Son, make me as one of thy hired Servants.*

Miſery, and *Shame*, and *Repentance* always tread cloſe at the Heels of *Wickedneſs*; and indeed, ſo *much* Miſery and Shame, as Sin is the Occaſion of, muſt needs make any Man that *conſiders* and is not *hardned* in his Iniquity, to repent and be *ſorry* that ever he committed it. *When ye were the Servants of Sin*, ſays the Apoſtle to the *Romans*, *ye were free from Righteouſneſs*; Rom. 6. 20, 21. ye had what ye deſir'd, and liv'd without God and Religion in the World, and were a Law unto your ſelves (as the Prodigal, weary of his Father's Inſpection over him, deſir'd his Portion and went into a far Country, and there liv'd riotouſly and without Controul) *But what Fruit had ye of thoſe things whereof ye are now aſham'd? For the End of theſe things is Death.* And this the young Prodigal found too true likewiſe by a ſad Experience, and waſted what he had and was ready to periſh with Hunger, and glad to ſubmit to the baſeſt Servitude for Suſtenance,

nance, snd at last was fain, with much *Shame* and *Repentance*, to return to his Father, and humbly confess his Folly and Unworthiness to be call'd any more his *Son*, and desir'd only the Favour of being made as one of his hired Servants. The Works of Darkness, as St. *Paul* says, are always *unfruitful* of any thing that is really *satisfying* and good; but bring forth *Briars and Thorns* in Abundance, many Troubles and Vexations, wherewith to tear and torment the miserable sinful Soul.

Let us consider a little more *particularly* this *Resolution* of the Prodigal to return to his Father, and *when* it was that he took it up.

The Parable says, he made this Resolution, *when he came to himself*, and considered how many of his Father's *hired Servants* had Bread enough and to spare, while he that was his *Son* was ready to *perish with Hunger*.

Indeed, every *wicked* Man is *beside himself*, out of his *Reason* and his *Wits*;

Quem mala stultitia & quæcunque insciția veri
Cæcum agit, insanum.
Horat. Serm. Lib. II. Sat 3.

——— *ubi prava*
Stultitia, hic summa est insania: Qui sceleratus
Et furiosus erit, ——— Horat. ibid.

For what Man of a *Sound* Mind would act so strangely and make such disadvantagious Choices,

Choices, as a *Sinner* does? Who with his Wits about him would take all Ways poſſible to make himſelf *miſerable* to all Eternity, and when at the ſame time too, he might with leſs Trouble make himſelf eternally *happy*? Who, that could make uſe of his Reaſon, would chuſe to enjoy the Happineſs of a *Brute*, a *Goat* or a *Swine* for Inſtance, rather than that of a *Man* or an *Angel*, nay, of God himſelf? Who but a *Fool* or a *Mad-man* would part with the *certain Reverſion* of a *Crown* and *Scepter*, for the *preſent* Poſſeſſion of a Bag of Counters? And yet, this does every obſtinate Sinner do, and therefore may well be ſaid to be void of Reaſon, and beſide himſelf; but, becauſe he is *willfully* ſo, and *will* not make *uſe* of his *Reaſon* to the Purpoſes for which it was given him, *his* Madneſs is his *Fault* rather than his *Misfortune*, and the *Extravagancies* of it will be without *Excuſe*.

In this *moral* Frenzie was the Prodigal in the Parable, when he left his *Father* and waſted his Subſtance afar off in Exceſs of Riot; till at length the ſad *Conſequences* of his Extravagancy brought him again to his Reaſon; and when he *came to himſelf*, he reſolv'd to *ariſe and return to his Father*, &c.

A Man's *coming to himſelf*, in a Religious Senſe, is the making *uſe* of his *Reaſon* in reflecting upon the paſt Errors and Miſcarriages of his Life; in conſidering the many ſad *Conſequences* of Vice, and the great *Obligation* we

we have upon all Accounts to live *Religiously*, and fully purposing upon such Consideration, to break off all evil Courses, and live for the Future as becomes *Men* and *Christians*. For a Man is never more himself, than when he exercises his Reason upon the best of Objects, *Religion*; and considers how he may best conform himself to the Holy Rules of Christianity, and purposes to do accordingly: And he that suffers himself to be hurried on by impetuous Passions and unruly Lusts, to commit vile Actions, and neglects to make use of his Reason to govern and keep in *order* his Affections, acts more like a *Brute* than a *Man*, and is not yet *come to himself*.

Consideration is indeed the *Life* of both *speculative* and *practical* Religion; and then 'tis that Men *believe* and *live amiss*, when they cease to *consider* as they ought. For, there is so much of *Truth* and *Evidence* in the things a Christian is to *believe*; and the things he is to *do*, are so *excellent* in themselves, and so conducive to *intire* Happiness both here and hereafter; that no Man, that *duly* considers and *attends* to either, but will be powerfully inclin'd to *assent* to the one, and *practise* the other, and be no longer an Infidel or Heretick, or live a vicious irreligious Life.

'Twas *Consideration* made the Prodigal Son resolve to return to his Father, and humble himself before him; and could the Sinners of this Age be perswaded seriously to *consider* and

weigh

weigh things together, they would ſoon ſee Reaſon enough to convince them that 'tis their wiſeſt Courſe to live at another Rate than formerly, and put an End to their Extravagances by Repentance.

But *what* did this Prodigal conſider when he came to himſelf, that ſo powerfully inclin'd him to return to his Father with ſuch an humble and ſhameful Confeſſion of his Extravagancy? 'Twas *this*; *How many of my Father's hired Servants have Bread enough and to ſpare, and I periſh with Hunger?* He found by a woful Experience, that however uneaſie 'twas to him formerly to be under his Father's Eye, and in Subjection to his Commands; 'twas by a far happier Condition than that, which by his Prodigality he was then reduc'd to: The meaneſt of his Father's *Servants* was in Circumſtances than *he*, and therefore he thought it his wiſeſt Courſe to ariſe and return to his Father. And ſo would it be with a Sinner, would he but *compare* a Virtuous and Vicious Courſe of Life together. He would find by his own ſad Experience if he would but attend to it, that all his Extravagances, from which at firſt he expected to reap ſo much Happineſs, are not only *Vanity*, empty and unſatisfying, but likewiſe *Vexation of Spirit*; full of Troubles and Misfortunes, attended with Shame and Diſgrace, inward *Remorſe* and Gripings of Conſcience, and dire Forbodings of the Wrath to come. And this

would soon convince him of the much greater Happiness of Obedience and Submission to the Will of God; for that has none of all this Misery, but *Peace* of Conscience, inward *Contentment* and *Satisfaction* of Mind, and the comfortable Expectation of Eternal Happiness in the Presence of God. And the *Conclusion* of such Considerations, would be, his Resolution to arise and go to his Heavenly Father, and with much Humility and sincere Contrition say unto him, *Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be call'd thy Son, make me as one of thy hired Servants.* And indeed, the poorest good Man that is a diligent and faithful Servant of God, is in an infinitely happier Condition than the greatest *wicked* Prince; he experiences more true Happiness even in this World, and when he shall hear the joyful Sound at the Day of Judgment, *Well done good and faithful Servant, enter into the Joy of thy Lord,* and wicked Emperors be thrust away, with *I know you not, depart from me ye Workers of Iniquity*; then shall all the World *discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not*: The *former* shall have *Bread enough, and to spare,* their Happiness shall be compleat and *full*; while the *latter* shall perish with a keen Hunger after what they shall never enjoy, and for ever be sent *empty away.*

After

After the Prodigal had *conſider'd* himſelf into a Reſolution of *returning* to his Father, he put his Reſolution into *practice*, and aroſe and *came* to his Father, and ſaid, *Father, I have ſinned*, &c.

And truly, 'tis not bare *reſolving* that is ſufficient to Amendment of Life; we muſt *act* agreeably, and that *immediately* too, or elſe our Reſolutions, though never ſo earneſtly made, will vaniſh into *nothing*, and the Breach of them ſtill more increaſe our *Guilt*. For, when a Man has proceeded ſo far towards a new Life, as to *reſolve* to forſake every Evil Way, and no longer to inſiſt in his former vile Courſes; 'tis a ſign that his Soul is rous'd and *awaken'd* from its ſpiritual Sleep, that his Eyes are *open'd*, and that he *diſcerns* his Error, and if after all this, he *ſtill* perſiſts in it, he then ſins againſt clear *Light* and *Knowledge*, which is the higheſt Aggravation of a Fault.

As a Sinner therefore ſhould, as ſoon as he is become ſenſible of his Sin, immediately *reſolve* to *forſake* it, and return to his Obedience to God; ſo muſt he immediately put his Reſolution into Practice: for otherwiſe, he does but mock God, and deceive his own Soul, and will only increaſe his Damnation. A well-grounded Reſolution is a good *Preparative* to Amendment, but 'tis but a *Preparative*; and to *reſolve* to do a Thing, and *actually* to do it, are two very different Things. We all of us, I hope, that pretend to be Chriſtians, ſo far

consider, as to grieve and be asham'd for having offended our Good God; and are at *that* instant resolv'd never willingly to trangress his Holy Will again: Let us but *keep* our Resolutions, and we shall be Happy; for, such as with the Prodigal, *actually* return to their Heavenly Father, and humble themselves before him, he is ready, with the greatest Expressions of Kindness, to receive to his Favour. Which brings me to the

Last Thing express'd in this Parable; (*viz.*) The great Tenderness and Compassion of the Father of Spirits to such as repent in earnest, and perform their Resolves of Amendment; his Readiness to be reconciled to them, and extraordinary Joy for their Return, *because they were dead but are alive again, were lost but are found.* For so 'tis said in the Parable, That when the Returning Prodigal was yet *a great way off, his Father saw him, and had Compassion, and ran, and fell on his Neck, and kissed him, and said to his Servants, Bring forth the best Robe, and put it on him, and put a Ring on his Hand, and Shooes on his Feet, and bring hither the fatted Calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry.*

While he was *yet a great way off*, his Father had *Compassion, and ran to meet him.* By this is express'd God's great Desire that a Sinner's Repentance should be *compleated*; he will *meet* him, and that with more than ordinary Assistances of his Spirit, lest any Temptation should

ſhould ſo far prevail as to *divert* his Return, and make him *change* or *defer* to put in *practice*, that good Reſolution he had taken up. He *prevents* a *real* Penitent with the Riches of his Grace, and while he is yet a *great way off*, labouring with the Difficulties that attend a thorough Change of Life; he, with infinite Charity and Compaſſion, comes forth to *meet* him, that by his Divine Aid he may ſecure his Retreat from the Endeavours of the Devil and his own vile Affections, to bring him back to his former vain and wicked Courſes, which by God's Grace he has reſolved to break off by Repentance.

And when a Sinner's Repentance is *compleated*, and he is actually return'd with Shame and Sorrow to his Heavenly Father; what *rejoycing* is there! With what endearing Kindneſs does the Divine Goodneſs entertain a miſerable ſelf-condemn'd Wretch, that ſees his Error, is aſham'd and griev'd for it, and returns with hearty Purpoſe to obey him better! 'Tis repreſented in the Parable, by the higheſt Expreſſions of Joy that were in thoſe Eaſtern Countries; the Prodigal's Father *ran to meet him, fell on his Neck, and kiſſed him, commanded the beſt Robe to be put on him, and a Ring on his Hand, and Shooes on his Feet, and made merry with Feaſting, and Muſick, and Dancing.*

One would have thought, his wild Extravagancy ſhould have met with rougher Entertainment, at leaſt at *firſt* Interview; and

Reproof have been given to his *Folly*, which brought him to so much *Misery*. But his Fathers Compassion was above his Anger; and because he whom he thought was *dead* and *lost*, was *alive* again and *found*, he forgot all *Resentment*, and embraced him with Tenderness and Endearment. And thus it is with God when he sees a Returning Sinner: Though the Sinner has indeed deserved nothing but the Expresses of his Wrath and Indignation, and to be for ever *rejected* by him; yet he who gives freely to every Man, and upbraideth not, and whose Mercy is over all his Works, *will not break the bruised Reed, nor quench the smoaking Flax*; but in infinite Goodness, not only give *Admittance* to, but receive with *joy* his Returning Prodigals.

And how can we enough praise and admire these Wonders of the Divine Compassion and Love, to poor miserable and polluted Creatures! 'Tis an Abyss that can never be fathom'd; our Thoughts are lost and swallow'd up in the Contemplation of it, and *silent Admiration* does best express that which *no words* can reach.

And now, for a Conclusion of the whole; Since Vice and a *Lawless* Course of Living, is the Parent of so much Misery, and has so many ill Consequences closely attending it even in *this* World, and is, as the most *extravagant*, so the most *unhappy Prodigality*; and since the Miseries of a wicked Life *here*, are

but

but the Beginnings of unconceivable and *eternal* Sorrows *hereafter*; and ſince there is but *one* Cure for this great Evil, and nothing but ſincere *Repentance* will ſave us from Deſtruction; and ſince God is ſo infinitely good, as greatly to *deſire* we would Repent, and return to our Obedience to him, and affords us all poſſible Helps in order to it, and greatly *rejoyces* to ſee a Sinner *penitent*, and receives him with the higheſt Expreſſions of *Tenderneſs* and *Love*; ſince all this is ſo, let us put off no longer, what, if we would be happy, muſt be done at laſt; but, with the greateſt Thankfulneſs, embrace the ineſtimable Favour of being again receiv'd into the Arms of our merciful God and Saviour. Let us immediately turn from every Evil Way, and that we may do ſo *effectually*, let us lay to heart how *vexatious*, and full of *Shame*, and utterly *unprofitable* a wicked Courſe of Life is, and how full of *Pleaſure* and unſpeakable *Delight* it is to advance from Grace to Grace, and to *perfect Holineſs in the fear of God.* And having *reſolv'd* well, and fully purpoſed our Return to the wiſe and good Government of our Heavenly Father, without Delay *do* as we have *reſolv'd*, and ariſe and go to our Father, and ſay, with all Humility and Confuſion of Face, and ſincere Contrition, *Father, I have ſinned againſt Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son*; and he whoſe Compaſſions never fail, will embrace us with the Arms of

his Mercy, and forget our former Provocations, and take us to his Favour and Protection in this World, and at length make us Partakers of the Joys of his *Heavenly Kingdom*; where there shall be Rejoycing in his Presence for our Happiness and Salvation, *Because we were dead but are alive again, were lost but are found.*

The PRAYER.

I.

ALmighty and most merciful Father, whose Government is directed by infinite Wisdom, and proceeds in infinite Goodness, so that happy are they in whose Hearts are thy Ways, and that turn not aside from thy Commandments; I confess, with Shame and Confusion of Face, and I hope with a truly humble, penitent, and obedient Heart, that my vile Extravagancy and Impatience of thy blessed Restraint, and foolish Desire of Liberty, and following the Byas of my own brutish Inclinations, has hitherto been too notorious, and sad have been the Consequences of my Departure from thee. I have prodigally wasted thy Divine Grace, and turn'd it into Wantonness, I have squander'd away my Time in Vanity and Folly, which is the only Opportunity of securing my Salvation; and, without Infinite Mercy, have forfeited the Reversion of my Heavenly Inheritance; and all this, for what is below the Affecti-

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ons of a Rational Creature, and indeed, as I have found by a costly Experience, no other than Vanity and Vexation of Spirit. And just it is, thou shouldst withdraw thy Grace, which I have so often slighted and abused, and leave my Soul to starve and famish, and dayly draw nearer and nearer to Eternal Death. But thou, O Father of Mercies, whose Compassions fail not, and who desirest not the Death of a Sinner, but rather that he should repent and live; look graciously upon thy Returning Prodigal.

II.

I now am sadly sensible of my deplorable Condition, and beg importunately, that I may so effectually hearken to the inward Shame and Remorse that now I feel, for my past inexcusable Madness and Folly, as that I may immediately return to my Obedience, to thee my infinitely wise and indulgent Parent, who art ready, I know, to stretch out thy Arms to receive me, and to whose preventing Grace I owe these Pious Resolutions of humbling my self before thee. Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son: *make me but as one of thy meanest Servants: I am now fully sensible, that one Day in thy Courts is better than a Thousand, and had rather be a Door-keeper in the House of my God, than to dwell in the Tents of Ungodliness. O continue to strengthen these good Affections in me, and send out thy Light and thy Truth, even thy blessed Spirit, that he may conduct me to thy Dwelling*

ling-Place, and secure my Retreat from the Kingdom of Darkness. O may I never defer what, if I would be happy, must be done at last, but instantly return to thee, O Father of Compassions. Then shall I experience the happy Exchange of Misery and Shame, for Joy unspeakable and full of Glory; and instead of being the Triumph of Malicious Fiends in Hell, occasion extraordinary Joy in the Presence of thee my God, and thy Holy Angels, because I was dead and am alive again, was lost but am found. *O Blessed God, verifie this Bliss upon me, for thy Mercies sake in Jesus our Redeemer.* Amen.

PARABLE

PARABLE XII.

Of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

Luke xvj. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31.

There was a certain Rich Man, which was clothed in Purple and fine Linnen, and fared ſumptuouſly every day;

And there was a certain Beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of Sores,

And deſiring to be fed with the Crumbs which fell from the Rich Man's Table: moreover, the Dogs came and licked his Sores.

And it came to paſs that the Beggar died, and was carried by the Angels into Abraham's Boſom: the Rich Man alſo died, and was buried.

And in Hell he lift up his Eyes, being in Torments, and ſeeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his Boſom.

And he cried and ſaid, Father Abraham have mercy on me, and ſend Lazarus, that he may dip

dip the tip of his finger in Water, and cool my Tongue, for I am tormented in this Flame.

But Abraham said, Son remember, that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good Things, and likewise Lazarus evil Things: but now, He is comforted, and Thou art tormented.

And besides all this, between Us and You, there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.

Then he said, I pray thee therefore Father, that thou wouldest send him to my Father's House;

For I have five Brethren: that he may testifie unto them, lest they also come into this Place of Torment.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them.

And he said, nay Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead they will Repent.

And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be perswaded though One rose from the Dead.

THIS Parable seems to be designed to inform us of *Three* Things:

First, That from a Man's Prosperous or Adverse Condition in *this* World, there is no Judgment to be made concerning his Condition in the *next*; and that 'tis not seldom that the *Happiness* Men meet with in *this* Life, is changed for *Misery* in the *other*, and

and that *Affliction* here ends in Happineſs hereafter.

Secondly, That whatever Alteration is made in the State and Condition of the Soul, after its *Departure* from this World, ſhall be from thenceforth for ever *unalterable*. And

Thirdly, That every Man may be ſufficiently *aſſur'd* of this that reads the Scriptures, and powerfully enough inclin'd to *avoid* that Future *Miſery*, and ſecure his Eternal *Happineſs*; without any more *extraordinary* Ways of Conviction of the *Truth* of this, and *Perſwaſion* to act accordingly: And that thoſe who are not *ſatisfied* with what has been *hitherto* reveal'd in this Matter, will *never* be ſatisfied, though One ſhould come from the Dead to aſſure them of it. Of each of theſe Particulars I ſhall diſcourſe in their Order.

The *firſt* thing this Parable informs us of is, that from a Man's proſperous or adverſe Condition in *this* World, there is no Judgment to be made concerning his Condition in the *next*; and that 'tis not ſeldom, that the Happineſs Men meet with in this Life, is chang'd for Miſery in the other; and on the contrary, that Affliction Here ends in Happineſs Hereafter. And this is expreſs'd in the Parable by a Poor *Beggar*, that was full of Sores, and begg'd but the Crums that fell from a Rich Man's Table, his being carried *by Angels into Abraham's Boſom* when he died, or received into that Place of Happineſs which

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is prepar'd for them that live and dye in the Faith and Fear of God, as *Abraham* did; while the Rich Man that was cloath'd in Purple and fine Linnen, and fared sumptuously every day, after *he* dy'd was *Tormented in the flames of Hell.*

'Twas the *Observation* and *Complaint* of *Solomon,* and might have been made (if it was not) long before, even from the Infancy of the World, that no Man knoweth either the Love or Hatred of God, by All that is here in *this* World before him; nay, that there are *Just* Men to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the *Wicked,* Eccl. 9. 1. and *Wicked* Men to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the *Righteous*; *i. e.* That *Wicked* Men are often observ'd to be *prosperous* here, as if they were the *Favourites* of Heaven, and rewarded for their Vertue, and *good* Men *calamitous* and afflicted, as if they were *hated* of God, and punish'd for their great Impieties.

Job makes a very pathetical Complaint to this purpose, *Job* 21. 5. and was indeed, *himself* a deplorable *Instance* of what he then complained of; and he introduces what he would say with the greatest Solemnity, *Mark me, and be astonished,* says he, *and lay your Hand upon your Mouth; Even when I remember I am afraid, and Trembling seiseth my Flesh. Wherefore do the Wicked live to become Old, yea are mighty in Power, and their Seed is esta-*

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bliſh'd in their ſight with them, and their Offſpring before their Eyes? *Whereas I,* might he have ſaid, (and queſtionleſs he alluded to it) I that have the Teſtimony of God himſelf, that there is none like me upon Earth, a *Perfect and an Upright Man, one that feareth God, and eſcheweth Evil,* Job 19. 9. am on a ſudden *ſtrip'd of all my Glory,* and my Children *All together* ſnatch'd from me, by a dreadful Accident, and my ſelf ſmitten with *ſore Boils,* from the Sole of my Foot unto my Crown, ſo that I am *weary of my Life,* and think I have reaſon to *curſe* the Day of my *Birth.* They ſpend their Days in *Wealth* and *Mirth,* and in a *Moment,* with a *quick* and *eaſie* Paſſage, go down to the Grave; whereas *I,* miſerable though innocent, am cloathed with *Worms,* and *Scabs,* and *Clods* of *Duſt*; my *ſighing* comes before my *Meat,* and my Roarings are *poured* out like the *Waters,* and *I long* for Death, but it cometh not.

Holy *David* likewiſe, *Pſal.* 73. 21. very feelingly complain'd of this, and the Prophet *Jeremy,* Jer. 12. 1. and indeed, this ſo ſeemingly ſtrange Method of Providence is the *Obſervation* of *every Man,* and the *Wonder* of *moſt.* And what *Concluſions* Men will be apt to draw from ſuch Obſervations, is eaſie to imagine. The *Beſt* of Men will be apt to be *diſcouraged,* and tempted to ſay with *David, Verily, I have cleanſed my Heart in vain, and waſh'd my Hands in Innocency*: And as for

Sinners

Sinners, no doubt but they will be emboldened by it to *strengthen themselves in their Wickedness*; and either perswade themselves that their Actions are *not* so *odious* in the sight of God as has been represented to them; or that, because they Thrive and *Prosper* more than *Better Men*, the Threats of Religion are but *Scare-Crows*, and because not *speedily*, shall *never* be inflicted; or, if there *be* another World, that they shall fare as well in *that* as they have done in this. And the more *indifferent* sort of Men, that are neither very Bad nor very Good, if they *prosper* here, will be apt to think it is an Argument of God's *Favour* to them, that they perform an acceptable Service to him *now*, and that it shall therefore be well with them hereafter; and if they do *not* Thrive, they will be inclined to follow the Course of those that *do*, as looking upon *Prosperity* to be an Argument of the *Favour and Blessing of God*.

But *All* this is *throughout* a great and *dangerous* Mistake; and Worldly *Prosperity* is neither a certain Argument of God's *Favour* to Men in *this* World, or of their *Happiness* in the *next*: Neither is *Affliction* a certain Sign of God's *casting Men off* here, or a sure Forerunner of *Eternal Misery* hereafter; but frequently on the *contrary*, the *Good* are *calamitous* in this World, but receiv'd into *Abraham*'s Bosom in the other, and those that are Prosperous

perous and *Happy* here, too often have their Portion in the *Flames of Hell* hereafter.

Proſperity is in it ſelf indeed a *Bleſſing*, and promis'd as a Part of the Reward of Godlineſs; and accordingly, many good Men are Happy even here; and were *All* truly *good*, *All* would be Proſperous and *Happy*; for 'tis *Sin* only that makes the World *miſerable*: And on the other ſide, Affliction is *in it ſelf* a great Evil, and by *no means joyous but grievous*, and is always the Puniſhment of ſome *Offence*. But, oftentimes Worldly *Proſperity* is ſent as a *Curſe* rather than a *Bleſſing*, and is the Effect of God's Diſpleaſure, and the *only* Happineſs that ſome ſhall e'er enjoy. And *Adverſity* proves a great *Bleſſing*, and is an Expreſſion of God's Favour and Paternal Regard, the only Miſery ſome ſhall ever feel, and an Introduction to Eternal Happineſs; ſome, in mercy, being corrected *here* for their Faults, that they may eſcape the *everlaſting* Puniſhments of the other World, and others *fatted up* here, as to a Day of *Slaughter*, and ſuffered (ſince they chooſe it) to have their Portion in *this* Life. As *Abraham* in the Parable, ſaid to the Rich Man, (who through the Exceſs of his Torment, begg'd that he would ſend *him* who was once a *poor Lazarus*, but then in a Place of *Happineſs*, to dip his Finger in Water, and come and cool his Tongue) *Son, remember that thou in thy Lifetime receiveds thy good Things, and likewiſe*

Lazarus his evil Things, but now, he is comforted and thou art tormented.

And indeed, it is no wonder that it should be so, and that *Prosperity* in *this* World should so often end in *Misery* in the *next*, and the *Afflictions* Men meet with *here*, be turn'd into *Happiness hereafter*. For Worldly Prosperity, however *charming* it may *appear* to us, is a State so full of *Dangers*, so beset with *Temptations to Vice*, so apt to divert Men from attending to Things of infinitely greater moment, and laying up a Treasure in Heaven; and *Adversity* on the contrary, though very *uneasie* to *Flesh* and *Blood*, yet is so apt therefore to *wean* Men from the World, and the fading Vanities of it, and make them out of Love with what is so *fickle* and uncertain, and full of Trouble; and is a State that *humbles* Men much, and increases *Devotion* and *Trust in God*, and puts 'em upon Repentance, and a Desire of enjoying that *Heavenly* Treasure which shall never be taken from them: That for a Rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, seems by far the greater Difficulty, and more likelihood is there of the *Calamities* of this World bringing a Man to that happy Place, than the prosperous Enjoyment of its *Pleasures*. And accordingly says the Apostle, *Not many Rich, not many Mighty are called*, and *that Riches are a Temptation and a Snare, and drown Men in divers hurtful Lusts, and bring them to Destruction and Perdition*; and therefore

therefore exhorts Men to *count it all Joy when they fall into divers Temptations* or Afflictions.

The Uſe then, that we may make of this firſt Part of the Parable, is this; not to be *dejected* under *Adverſity*, as if *caſt off* by God, and utterly depriv'd of his Favour, nor *puff'd up* by *Proſperity*, as if *peculiarly dear* to Heaven; but in every State to make it our greateſt Care and Endeavour to ſecure our *main* Intereſt, and with Fear and Trembling, in the one Condition as well as the other, to work out our Salvation, by the Practice of that *Holineſs*, without which, *no Man*, whether Rich or Poor, Calamitous or Proſperous, *ſhall ſee the Lord*; and *with* which *any* Man, in whatſoever Circumſtances he is *in this Life*, ſhall be ſure of a glorious Eternity in the *Preſence* and *Enjoyment* of his *Maker*. If Riches increaſe by honeſt Induſtry, and conſcientious Dealing, and prudent Management, we ought to eſteem it as a *Bleſſing*, and humbly thank God for it; but by no means ſhould we *ſet our Hearts* upon them, nor grow high-minded, and conceited of our ſelves, as if greatly in the Favour and Eſteem of God, and our Proſperity the Reward of our extraordinary Vertue; nor *deſpiſe* the Poverty of others, looking upon them as leſs *Holy* becauſe not ſo *proſperous* as we. Neither ſhould we grow vain and *luxurious*, or covetous and *ſordid*, but *make Friends with the Mammon of Unrighteouſneſs*, and act like *good Stewards of the*

manifold Grace of God, being given to Hospitality, and ready to relieve the Necessities of such as are in want; remembring always, that *many* have *all* their Share of Happiness in *this* Life, and while they dote immoderately upon the World, and place their chief Good in being prosperous here, forfeit their Glorious Reversion hereafter: And always fearing lest our Prosperity become a *Snare* to us in this Matter, and we turn it into a *Curse* by our ill Use of it, and become such *Fools*, as for the Gain of a little of the World, to lose our Immortal Souls. What Comfort had the Rich Man in the Parable of all his former Prosperity, when he lay weltring in the Flames of Hell? All his *Purple* and Fine Linnen, and Sumptuous Fare, because he abus'd 'em to Luxury and Excess, and grew negligent of laying up a Treasure of *good Works* in *Heaven*; ended at length in the Want of a Drop of Water to cool his inflam'd Tongue.

If *Affliction* and *Poverty* should be our Lot, 'tis then our Duty to endeavour to be *contented*, and not despond as if utterly *rejected* of God, but to remember that there is a *better* World, in which those shall be unspeakably and for ever happy, that are patient and *resign'd* in this Vally of the Shadow of Death; that the Lord *loveth* whom he *chasteneth*, and that if we comply with the *Ends* of his Correction, and amend under his Paternal Rod, *our light Affliction, which is*

but

but for a Moment, shall work for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory. Lazarus in the Parable, we read, was miserably poor, desirous, though but of the *Fragments* that *fell from* the Rich Man's Table, and full of noisom painful Sores, a sad Spectacle both to himself and others; and yet, when he died, was carried up by *Angels* into *Abraham*'s *Bosom*. 'Tis not a Man's *outward* Circumstances that God respects, but the inward *Temper* of his *Mind*, and often makes his *outward* Condition *calamitous*, that his *Mind* may grow *better*; 1 Sam. 16. 7. and if a Man be as poor and despicable in the Eye of the World as *Lazarus*, yet if he is of a contented *resign'd* Soul, and makes it his Endeavour to be *rich towards God*, he at length shall be fill'd with *Joy unspeakable and full of Glory*, while many *rich* that have their Portion in *this* Life shall be *sent empty away*.

And thus much for the *first* thing this Parable informs us of, namely, that from a Man's prosperous or adverse Condition in *this* world, there is no Judgment to be made concerning his final Condition in the *next*.

The *second* thing it informs us of is, that whatever Change is made in the Condition of the Soul, after its *Departure* from this World, its State shall be from thenceforth for ever *unalterable*. For so in the Parable, when the Rich Man being in Torments, lifted up his Eyes, and saw *Abraham afar off*, and *Lazarus in*

his Bosom, and cry'd and said, *Father* Abraham *have Mercy on me, and send* Lazarus *that he may dip the Tip of his Finger in Water and cool my Tongue, for I am tormented in this Flame*; *Abraham*, after he had told him that *he* had in his *Life-Time* received his good things, and *Lazarus* his evil things, and that then there was a great and unexpected Change, and *Lazarus* was comforted and he tormented; he adds, moreover, that between him and them there was a *great Gulf fixed*, so that those which would pass from thence to him could not, neither could any pass from him to them.

What is meant by this *Gulf fixed* between Heaven and Hell, which hinders any *Comfort or Relief* coming from thence to that miserable Place, or any Trouble or Annoyance from that Place to Heaven, so that the Condition both of the Wicked and the Righteous, remains unchangeably *happy* or *miserable* respectively, has been much controverted, especially amongst the School-men But it tending to very little Edification to relate their Opinions, most of which are very frivilous; I shall only say what is the most receiv'd Opinion in our Church. By the *Gulf* fixed, we suppose is only meant God's irreversible Decree that those whose Wickedness made them incapable of the Vision and Enjoyment of God, and sunk them down to Hell, shall for ever remain there without any Hopes of Comfort or Relief, and that the *Righteous* like-

likewiſe ſhall be receiv'd into *Life* and Happineſs *everlaſting*, and ſuch as all the Powers of Hell ſhall never be able to leſſen or diſturb. And this methinks to any ſenſible Man, ſhould appear to be an Opinion the moſt reaſonable and moſt agreeable to the Holy Writings. Now here 'twill be worth our while, ſince the rich Man's Puniſhment is expreſs'd by his being tormented in Flame, and doom'd to be for *ever* ſo, to ſatisfie two Queries uſually put in this Caſe; as *firſt*, Why the Torments of Hell are expreſs'd by Flames and Burning? And *ſecondly*, How it can be conſiſtent with the Divine Juſtice to puniſh the *tranſient* Acts of Sin, with ſuch an *endleſs Miſery*?

To the *firſt* I return this Anſwer as to me the moſt ſatisfactory. Though I believe that at the general Conflagration, when the Heavens ſhall be ſhrunk up as a ſcorch'd Parchment, and the Elements melt with fervent Heat, and the World and all that's in it be burn'd up; though I believe that God will then take Vengeance of his Enemies in *real* Flames of Fire, which ſhall for ever encircle and prey upon their Bodies: yet I think, *that* will be the *leaſt* Part of their Torment, and that the *Extremity* of it will conſiſt in the *inward* Trouble of their *Minds*; ariſing from an *impatient appetite*, and continual *Thirſt* after that *Felicity*, which they know, through their *own Default*, they ſhall *never* come to *enjoy*. And that ſuch *vehement Deſires*, and the Paſſi-

ons consequent upon the *disappointment* of them, should be call'd *Flames* and *Burning*, is no more than what is usual in our common Manner of speaking; and the Expression of *fervent* and *ardent* Desires, is often met with in the holy writings too, particularly, where *David* says, *My Soul breaketh out with the very fervent desire it hath always to thy Commandments.* And Rage, and Fury, and Impatience, and the like, which attend *unsatisfied* Desires, are likewise frequently attended with the Epithet of *Fire*; as every one must needs have observ'd.

Now, *Man* having an *innate uncontroulable Thirst* after *Happiness*, and which is always equally intense, and that to the highest Degree; when, (as the Punishment of his Rebellion against God, his foolish and wicked Choices here, his Pursuit after *lower* Good, and Neglect of the *supreme*) he shall be *for ever* banish'd to an infinite Distance, not only from the *Fountain* of Happiness, but from every *Stream* and *Participation* of it (which here below *cool'd* his Heat a little, and for the *present* gratified that his Desire) and yet the Appetite and *Thirst* after it continuing as great as ever, and the Wretch withal sensible of the *utter Impossibility* of attaining it; and that, not so much as *one Drop* from that Fountain of Bliss shall ever be given to allay his Thirst, and cool his parch'd and inflam'd Tongue: His Desire must for ever be to the highest Degree craving

craving and *importunate* in *vain*; and being continually thus *diſappointed*, his *Impatience* will ſtill grow hotter and hotter, and his Remorſe for bringing this upon *himſelf*, turning to eternal *Rage* and *Fury*, and boyling up like Rivers of enflam'd Brimſtone, the *Fire* will be *everlaſting*. And what a Calenture, think we, will the whole Man be in; when *without* the fierceſt *material* Flames ſhall prey upon the *Body*, and hotter Fires *within* torment the *Soul!* And this Notion of the *Flames* of Hell, ſeems to me not obſcurely hinted, in the Rich Man's lifting up his Eyes in his Torment, and when he ſaw the happy State of *Lazarus* in *Abraham*'s Boſom, begging him to impart, though but *one Drop* of that Bliſs he enjoy'd, to cool *his* parched Tongue. His Deſire of that Happineſs was *in* the greateſt Degree of *Ardency*, and when he ſaw *Lazarus* in *Abraham*'s Boſom, *then* he cry'd out, Father *Abraham* have Mercy on me, for I am tormented in this *Flame*. Thus much for the *firſt* Query. To the *ſecond* I return this in Brief; That ſince *Sin* is the *greateſt poſſible Evil*, (it being a Violation of the *ſtrongeſt* Tyes and *Obligations*, an Oppoſition and *Contrariety* to the *Supreme Good*, and in *no* Caſe *eligible*, as every conſidering Man muſt needs confeſs) it can't be too rigorouſly dealt with, even by the Infliction of the *greateſt poſſible Puniſhment*; for there is the ſame Proportion between the *greateſt Evil* and the *greateſt Puniſhment*,

nishment, as between a *lesser Evil* and a *lesser Punishment*: And therefore, unless we'll say, there can never be any Proportion between a Fault and its Punishment, I think we must own, there is Proportion *here*.

Now the Use we may make of this second Part of the Parable is this. That, since the Consequence of a Life of Wickedness, is so *dreadful* and *remediless* a Ruin, and the Wages of Sin this *eternal* Torment and Death; we would be above all things careful to *avoid* this Place of everlasting Torments, and make use of our Time and Opportunity while we have it, in providing for a *happy* Eternity. The End of every Man's *Life* is the Beginning of Eternity to *him*; then *Time* shall be no more, no more Space for Repentance and working out our Salvation, and after the great Change that Death will make in our Condition, no more Changes from thence forward for ever, no intermediate Purgatory to cleanse our remaining Filthiness; but as Death leaves a Soul, so shall Judgment find it, and an *irreversible* Sentence be pass'd upon it. And this great Truth can never be too often call'd to Remembrance; and there is so much of *Terror* in it to a wicked Liver, that whoever *thinks* at all, must needs be inclin'd by it to husband *well* this his *only* Opportunity of making himself for ever Happy, and immediately endeavour to clear himself from that Guilt, which, if he *dies* in, will make him for ever miserable, and that without the least *Alleviation*. The

The *laſt* thing this Parable informs us of is, That every Man may be ſufficiently aſſur'd of this great Truth, that reads the Scriptures; and powerfully enough inclin'd to avoid that future Miſery, and ſecure his eternal Happineſs, without any more *extraordinary* Ways of Conviction in this Matter, or Perſwaſives to act accordingly: And that thoſe who are not ſatisfied with what has already been reveal'd of future Rewards and Puniſhments, in all Probability will *never* be ſatisfied, tho' one ſhould *come from the Dead* to aſſure them of it.

This is expreſs'd in the Parable by the Rich Man's deſiring (after he was ſadly aſſur'd by *Abraham*, that there was no Remedy for *himſelf*) that he would *ſend Lazarus to his Father's Houſe* (*for I have five Brethren, ſays he*) *that he may teſtifie unto them, leſt they alſo come into this Place of Torment.* To this *Abraham* anſwers, *They have* Moſes *and the Prophets, let them hear them.* But this would not ſatisfie the miſerable Rich Man, *and he ſaid, nay, Father* Abraham, *but if one went from the Dead they will repent.* To this *Abraham* gives this final anſwer: *If they hear not* Moſes *and the Prophets, neither will they be perſwaded though one aroſe from the Dead.* As if he had ſaid, There is all the Aſſurance given to Men by the Holy Writings of the Truth of theſe things, that any *reaſonable* Man can deſire; and the ſame Obſtinate and Atheiſtick Infidelity

lity and Debauchery of Manners that makes Men disbelieve what the *Scriptures* affirm of *another Life*, would make them *still* disbelieve it, though one arose from the Dead to assure them of it.

And if this was true *before* the Gospel, when these things were but *darkly* reveal'd in comparison of what they are *now*, and the *Jews* might *then* be sufficiently assur'd of them by attending to the Writings of *Moses and the Prophets*; it is a much more *confirm'd* Truth to us Christians, the Scriptures of the *New* Testament assuring us of it in the most *plain* and *express* Terms that can be: According to what the Apostle says, 2 *Tim.* 1. 8. that our Lord *has brought Life and Immortality to Light by the Gospel.*

And yet, some are so unreasonable, as when we discourse about Judgment to come, and the Rewards and Punishments of another Life, not to *tremble* at it as *Felix* did, but with perverse Infidelity question the *Truth* of the thing, and ask us how we can be *sure* it is and shall be so, and whether we have been told it by one that *came* from the other World, and has *experienc'd* what we say to be true: And that nothing less than such a Proof shall ever make them believe it. And when they are urg'd with the Testimony of Moses *and the Prophets*, and of the *Son of God* himself; they have the Confidence to laugh at this as an Invention of *Church-Men*, and no better than

than a *Religious Cheat.* They are not ignorant, they ſay, that the Writings which we affirm were divinely inſpir'd, do very plainly and expreſly aſſert, That there ſhall be a Judgment to come, and that every Man ſhall be rais'd from the Dead, and plac'd before the Almighty Judge, and conſign'd to eternal Happineſs or Miſery, according to what they have done in *this* Life, whether it be good or evil: But they deny the *Truth* of thoſe Writings, and conſequently the Reality of what they aſſert of this Nature. Our Buſineſs therefore muſt be to prove the Truth and Divine Authority of thoſe Holy Scriptures, and then 'twill follow, that he that ſtill disbelieves the Doctrine of future Rewards and Puniſhments, and is not inclin'd to live accordingly, will neither be convinc'd nor perſwaded in this Inſtance, though one *roſe from the Dead.*

The Oppoſition Anti-ſcripturiſts make againſt the Holy Writings is in ſhort this. Either they will deny that thoſe Books were written by the Men whoſe Names they bear; or, if they are forc'd to grant *that*, they will deny the Truth of the *Matters of fact* which they ſet down, and endeavour to pick out Inconſiſtencies and Contradictions in their Relation; and if beaten from that Poſt, they'll deny that the Writers were Men *divinely inſpired*, and affirm that the Doctrine they wrote was meerly the Product of their own Brains, and what ſtrange Occurrences they record of their

their Master Jesus (as of *his* Resurrection from the Dead, as an Argument that there shall be another Life after this is ended, and all Men *then* arise likewise, and be call'd to give account of their Works) that this and the like strange Passages they record of Jesus, supposing them to be *true*, were not done by a *Divine* Power, but by Art Magick and the Power of the Devil. And this, could it be made good, would be a shrew'd Blow indeed, and all reveal'd Religion soon sink into Ruin: But in short (for to inlarge here, would far exceed the Bounds of a single Sermon) a Christians Defence of the *Truth* and *divine* Authority of the Holy Writings may be this.

First, Though some have *deny'd* that the Books of the Old and New Testament were written by the Men whose Names they bear, yet no Man ever yet could prove it; nay, on the contrary, they have been receiv'd as Genuine for many Hundreds of Years, and by Men of very different Religions and Perswasions, and that were bitter Enemies to the Religion there taught, and the Professors of it, and would have been extreamly glad to have prov'd the *Whole a Forgery* if they could. But since they *did* not, when 'twas so much for their Interest to have don't, 'tis plain they *could* not; and since they are, to this Day, approv'd by all Sorts of Religions as Genuine, 'tis as much as can be said in the Case, and as much as can be said for any other Book in the World;

And

And we muſt either throw aſide *all* Books as *ſpurious*, or believe *this* which we call the *Bible*, to be *genuine*. Well, but though *this* may be true, yet they object further, that there is no Truth in the Matters of *fact* which theſe Men ſet down; and particularly that the whole Story of our Saviour's Life, and Death, and Reſurrection, is a Falſhood, and that their Relations are *contradictious*. But to this we may return, That though this has been by ſome Men ſaid, yet it has never been *prov'd*; nay, on the contrary, ſeveral Heathen Writers, as *Pliny*, *Tacitus*, *Lucian*, *Suetonius*, and others of great Antiquity, quoted by * *Grotius* and † *Huetius*, have given in their Evidence as to the Matters of *fact* on the Chriſtian Side; and tho' they have made it their Buſineſs to *vilifie* the whole Story of our Lord's Life and Death, yet they could not *ſay*, much leſs *prove*, that there were *no* ſuch Occurrences as are recorded by the Evangeliſts. And truly, the Evangeliſts are ſo *punctual* in all Circumſtances of Time and Place, ſo *particular* in naming of Perſons concern'd, and that were Eye Witneſſes of thoſe Tranſactions, and thoſe too, Enemies as well as Friends, Jews and Heathens as well as Chriſtians; and thoſe Tranſactions were ſo *publick*, and in the Face of the *World*, and the Account of them was written ſo *ſoon* after they were *done*; that it would *then* have been

* *De verit. Chriſt. Rel. Lib.* 2.
† *Demonſtrat. Evangel. Propoſ.* 3. *prope Initium.*

been a very easie Matter to have detected the Falshood of the *Whole*, or of any *Part* of the Story, if there had been any, and both Jews and Heathens were very much *concern'd* to do it if they could, and no doubt, they endeavour'd it to the utmost of their Power. But yet, after all, we find that neither then nor since, any thing of this Nature has been fastned upon these Writings, but rather the Truth of them has been approv'd by the Confession of the *Enemies* of Christianity, than which no better Argument can be produc'd for the Truth of any Ancient History in the World.

And as for the *Contradictions* and *Inconsistencies*, which, they say, are in the New Testament; though to Men *unlearn'd*, or else deeply *prejudic'd*, some Things may at first sight seem to clash a little, yet upon a *closer* View of any *competent* and *unprejudic'd* Person, they will be found to be far from being irreconcileable: And these seeming Differences are likewise in things not *material*; in the *main* there is an unquestionable Harmony: Which, considering that *four* several Men were the Writers, and that they writ in different and *distant* Places, is no mean Argument, that what they so *punctually* and *agreeably* relate, is *true*. And indeed, those *little Differences* that are taken Notice of, are rather an Argument for the *Truth* of their Relation, than any thing to the contrary; for had it been a *pack'd* Business, they would have been careful

careful not to have differ'd in a *Title*. As for their *laſt* Reſerve, that ſuppoſing the Matter of *fact* to be *true* which they relate, yet thoſe ſtrange things that are recorded of *Jeſus*, might be performed by *Art*, *Magick*, and the Power of the *Devil*: And that, what he or his Apoſtles have deliver'd by Way of Precept and Doctrine, was meerly the Product of their own *Brains*, and no Inſpiration of God: To this we may return in this Manner.

'Tis certain that the coming of *Jeſus Chriſt* into the World, was to *deſtroy* the Works and Kingdom of the Devil, as is evident from his caſting ſo many evil Spirits out of poſſeſs'd Perſons, and from their trembling at his Preſence, and crying out for Dread; and from his teaching ſo *Holy* and Heavenly a Religion, than which, nothing can more weaken his Infernal Kingdom: And to atteſt the *Truth* of this his Doctrine, and that he was ſent by *God* to teach it to the World, he wrought diverſe and very amazing *Miracles*, and thoſe highly *beneficial* ones too; ſuch as giving *Sight* to Men that were *born blind*, and curing long and deſperate Diſeaſes, and raiſing to Life thoſe that had been *dead*, and one of them four Days *buried*, and this only with a *Word* or with his *Touch*, John 11. 17. which is Part of thoſe Matters of *fact*, ſet down by the Evangeliſts, which we before prov'd to be *true*.

Now, can any Man in his Senſes think, that the Devil, were he *able*, would ſo far aſſiſt

one that come on purpose into the World to *destroy* his Kingdom? 'Tis our Lord's own Answer to the foolishly malicious Pharisees, who, when they saw him work a stupendious Miracle upon one possessed with a Devil, both Blind and Dumb, insomuch that the Blind and Dumb both spake and saw; objected presently, *This Fellow casteth out Devils by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils. And Jesus knew their Thoughts and said unto them, every Kingdom divided against it self is brought to Desolation; and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, How then shall his Kingdom stand?* A *Demonstration* this, that 'twas not by the Power of the *Devil* that he wrought his Miracles, but by the Power of *God*. For though deluded *Men* may be so foolish as to frame such an *Objection*, the *Devil* is too *wise* to put the thing in *Practice*.

As for the other Part of what is objected, That what our Lord, and the Writers of the New Testament, the Evangelists and Apostles, have deliver'd by Way of *Precept* and *Doctrine*, was meerly the Product of their own Brains, and not the Inspiration of *God*; I might only appeal to the Precepts and Doctrines *themselves*, which are of so Exalted and Heavenly a Nature, and far above any thing, that either before or since was ever written by *Man*, that they *themselves* will prove their Original to be Divine. But there is a *farther* Proof of this, the many and great

Miracles

Miracles that were wrought, both by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, in Confirmation of the Doctrine they taught; and of their being commiſſion'd by God in an *extraordinary* Manner, to declare it as the Rule of their Obedience to *him*, and of their Converſation in the *World*. For, no reaſonable Man can think, that God would have ſo *wondrouſly* aſſiſted *thoſe* above all *other* Men, had they not been his peculiar Meſſengers, to make known his Will to Mankind.

And this, in ſhort, may be ſufficient to prove, to any reaſonable and unprejudic'd Man, the *Truth* and *Divine* Authority of the Holy *Scriptures*; and, conſequently, we have ſufficient Aſſurance, that there ſhall be another Life, when this is ended, wherein Men ſhall be for ever recompenc'd according to their Works: For this is very plainly and expreſly aſſerted in thoſe Writings, as every Man knows that has read them. And therefore 'tis as plain, that 'tis an unreaſonable *Obſtinacy*, and too great Love of the ſinful Enjoyments of *this* World, that makes Men deny their *Aſſent* to ſo great a Truth, and hinders them from being inclin'd by it, to lead a more *Innocent* and Holy Life. And the ſame Obſtinacy and Infidel Hardneſs of Heart, and Vileneſs of Manners, would make them *ſtill* disbelieve that there is a future State of Eternal Rewards and Puniſhments, according as Men live well or ill here below, and *ſtill* keep

them from being perſwaded by it to Amendment, tho' one came to them *from the Dead*, to aſſure them of it. For, what an eaſie Matter would it be for them to ſay, that the Apparition was but a *melancholly Fancy*, or a *Dream*, and regard it as if no *more*, and laugh at all things of that Nature, as too many now a-days are apt to do?

And he that will ſhut his Eyes againſt ſo much Reaſon, and Evidence, as there is, for the Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures, is Proof againſt any other Sort of Conviction whatever, even that of a Meſſenger ſent on purpoſe to him from the other World. For ſo our Lord in the Parable, *If they believe not Moſes and the Prophets* (we may add, and our Saviour, his Evangeliſts and Apoſtles) *neither will they be perſwaded, though one aroſe from the Dead.*

Wherefore it becomes us all to be very careful, leſt the Spirit of *Unbelief* enter into us, and we grow ſo *blinded* by the Deceitfulneſs of Sin, as either not to *believe*, or not duly to *attend* to this great and ſtrongly *confirm'd* Truth, of the Certainty of *another* Life after *this*; and of the eternal Rewards and Puniſhments then to be awarded to every Man according to his religious or impious Behaviour here.

'Tis in vain to expect any further *extraordinary* Proof of what is *already* plainly declar'd by him that cannot *lye*, in thoſe Writings which

which we have all the Reason in the World to believe, were written by his Divine Inspiration. Let us rather so seriously consider and *attend* to what is there reveal'd to us, as by those Terrors of the Lord relating to a future Judgment, to be perswaded to a sincere Revisal of our Ways, and deep Repentance of what we shall find to have been amiss, and immediate Endeavours to do no more wickedly. Let us have a care how we are charm'd with the Pomps and Vanities of this World, as if here were our Happiness and our Heaven, and we look'd for no other Life when this is done; and let us be chiefly employ'd in making Provision for that other *endless* Life which will succeed this, that *then* we may be *happy*, when, if we are *miserable*, we shall be *always* so. Remembring that the Rich Man in the Parable, who in *this* Life receiv'd his *good things*, and was wholly intent upon the Enjoyment of them, and look'd no further, made no Provision for what was to be hereafter in that other State; after he died was tormented in the Flames of Hell, and *wanted a Drop of Water to cool his Tongue*: While the poor, despis'd, and seemingly miserable *Lazarus*, that begg'd for the Crumbs which fell from his Table, and was taken little Notice of by any but the Rich Man's Dogs; because his Poverty made him Religious, and think of and provide for better things in an everlasting World, was, when he died, conducted

by *Angels into Abraham's Bosom*, that Place of Eternal Happiness, Rest and Peace, which is prepar'd for the Righteous.

These things, if we consider throughly and seriously, there will be no need of one from the Dead, either to *convince* us of the *Truth* of them, or to *perswade* us to an immediate *Repentance*, that we may escape that Place of Eternal *Torment*, reserv'd for the *obstinately wicked*, and be receiv'd into that happy State which shall for ever crown the pious Endeavours of the *Good*. Wherefore, for the future, *may we all so meditate upon these things, and give our selves so intirely to them, that, through God's gracious Assistance, our profiting may appear in all things*?

The PRAYER.

O *God, infinitely Wise, Just and Good, the Disposals of whose Providence here below, though always for the best, are yet often the Cause of Wonder to us Mortals; especially in the Prosperity of the Wicked, and the Afflictions of the Righteous: Teach me the Wisdom, I beseech thee, to look beyond this World for Happiness, and never to make vain Conclusions of thy Favour or Displeasure to my self or others, or concerning mine or their Condition in the other World, from the Circumstances of this our present Life: But rather in all things to acknowledge*

ledge thy Providence to be good and just, and be careful to secure my Duty in whatsoever Station thou shalt please to place me. Grant that in Prosperity I may be Humble, Thankful and Charitable; in Adversity Contented, and resign'd under thy Paternal Rod; and may make that good Use of every Condition which thou designest I should, and carefully avoid the Snares of each; and make it my great Endeavour, whilst I continue here below, to secure a happy Eternity in the World of Spirits, where my Condition, whatever it then shall be, will be unchangeable. And may my Belief of future Eternal Rewards and Punishments, be daily more and more strengthned and confirmed, by a serious and unprejudic'd Attention to the plain Assurance thou hast given me of it in the Holy Scriptures; so as not to be vainly desirous of any more extraordinary Evidence in this matter: But believing these great Truths without wavering, grant that I may immediately endeavour to reform my Life before it be too late. That so, when I go hence, I may be receiv'd into Abraham's *Bosom, the happy Portion of the Faithful, and escape the Place of endless Torment, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels. Grant this, O Gracious God, for Jesus Christ his Sake.*

PARABLE XIII.

Of the Importunate Widow.

Luke xviij. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

And Jesus spake a Parable to this End, that Men ought always to pray and not to faint;
Saying, there was in a City a Judge which feared not God, neither regarded Man.
And there was a Widow in that City, and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine Adversary.
And he would not for a while; but afterwards he said within himself, Though I fear not God, neither regard Man;
Yet because this Widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

THE Force of this Parable in order to the perswading to a constant and importunate Devotion, lies in this, That if *Importunity* will prevail with a sinful Man, that

that neither fears God, nor has any Compaſſion for the Miſeries of his Fellow-Creature, to grant Petitions offer'd to him: How much *more* prevalent will it be, with the infinitely *good God*, to relieve the Neceſſities of ſuch as devoutly and earneſtly implore his Help? And to the ſame Senſe is another Parable, *Luke* 11. 16. *Which of you ſhall have a Friend, and ſhall go to him at Midnight, and ſay unto him, Friend, lend me three Loaves, for a Friend of mine in his Journey is come unto me, and I have nothing to ſet before him; and he from within ſhall anſwer and ſay, Trouble me not, the Door is now ſhut, and my Children are with me in Bed, I cannot riſe and give thee. I ſay unto you, Though he will not riſe and give him becauſe he is his Friend, yet, becauſe of his Importunity, he will riſe and give him as many as he needeth.* And the Aplpication of this Parable is, *Ask and it ſhall be given you, ſeek and ye ſhall find, knock and it ſhall be open'd unto you.* And the Reaſon why our Lord applies the firſt Parable to God's *certainly avenging his Elect, which cry Day and Night to him, though he bear long with them*, I ſuppoſe to be (with Dr. *Hammond*) the great Diſcouragements his Diſciples were then under, by reaſon of the Malice of the Jews, which made it neceſſary for him to keep up their Spirits by aſſuring them, that God's not *immediately* hearkening to their Prayers by manifeſtly appearing in their Cauſe to protect *them* and puniſh their *Enemies*, was

no

no Argument that he *wholly disregarded* them, but that if they persisted in their grateful Importunity, he would at length answer their Desires. For, if Importunity be so prevalent even with *Wicked* Men, how much more will it be so with the God of Mercy and Compassion?

'Tis plain then, the chief Design of these Parables, though differently worded and apply'd, is to enforce the Necessity of *frequent and earnest Prayer*; and therefore, without any farther minute Explication of them, (they being so plain, that they neither *need* nor will *bear* it) I shall address my self to discourse upon what is couch'd under them, and endeavour to evince the Necessity of Praying *frequently*, and with Earnestness and *Importunity*.

That *Prayer*, or a Liberty of making our Requests known unto God, is a Privilege and Happiness inestimable, no one that considers the Nature of *God* and the Nature of *Man* can question. The *latter*, a poor *dependent* Creature, helpless and weak, short-sighted and ignorant, full of Wants and Necessities, obnoxious to innumerable evil Accidents of unruly Passions and Affections, the Hate and Envy of the Spirits of Darkness, strongly prone to what is Evil, and *averse* to what is Good; the *former*, a Being of infinite *fullness* and Perfection, infinitely *wise*, and *powerful*, and *good*, the Maker of the Universe, whose is the whole Creation, and to whom, every Thing that *is obeys*.

obeys. Now, that this indigent helpleſs Creature ſhould have *ſuch* a Patron to make his Wants known to, a Patron ſo inexhauſtibly *full*, ſo *wiſe*, ſo *able*, and ſo *willing*, to *direct* and *guide* him, to *ſupport* and *comfort* him, to *protect* and *defend*, to *relieve* and *ſuccour* him; to have Freedom of Addreſs to *ſuch* a Patron as this, is without all doubt, a Privilege and Favour that no Man can ſufficiently eſteem.

And yet, (ſo unaccountably ſtupid and thoughtleſs are Men for the Generality) What is more neglected, nay *deſpis'd*, than this invaluable Privilege! As if they were *full*, and had need of Nothing, or were *ſelf-ſufficient*, and could be their own Helpers; when indeed, they are *wretched and miſerable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*

In pity to this our *doubly* Forlorn Condition, our Bleſſed Saviour, the God of Compaſſions, that if poſſible we might receive the full Benefit of ſo great a Favour and Divine Condeſcention; has made this *Privilege* become our *Duty*, and bound it upon us by the *Commands* of his Holy Inſtitution; *encourag'd* our Practice of it by his own *Example*, and by Himſelf and his Apoſtles left ſuch Directions for the more *effectual* Performance of it, that every Man for the Future might be without Excuſe, if he either Pray'd *not at all*, or to no *purpoſe*.

Among which Directions, the *Importunity* recommended in this Parable, and in that other before mention'd ſo near of Kin to it, is greatly

greatly to be regarded; as that which will certainly, if other Requisites are not wanting, (for there are others) bring down a Blessing. But because there are other Things requir'd both by our Lord and his Apostles, in order to our Praying successfully, besides Importunity; I think it will not be amiss, if I discourse more *largely* of this great and *concerning* Duty of Prayer, than I could do if I strictly confin'd my self to the Bounds of this Parable; and endeavour these three Things.

First, To prove that Prayer is not only an inestimable *Privilege*, but the *Duty* of every Christian.

Secondly, To shew how *far* the Obligation to this Duty does *extend*. And,

Thirdly, What are the necessary *Requisites*, that this Duty may be perform'd *successfully*.

First, Prayer is not only the *Privilege*, but the *Duty* of every Christian.

Watch and Pray, that ye enter not into Temptation, Mat 26. 41. was our Lord's Charge to *Peter*, and the two Sons of *Zebedee*, in the Garden of his Agony; and not to them only, but to all others that are in their Circumstances, (*i. e.*) in great Danger of being tempted, and weak and unable of Themselves to make Resistance; and that, God knows, we all of us are, and therefore to all of us is this Command directed. *Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be open'd unto you*, says the same Blessed Jesus immediately after

after one of the Parables before mention'd; as if he had ſaid, God will be gracious and relieve your Neceſſities, but 'tis upon Condition you will lay your Wants before him, and implore his Help; according to that of St. *James*, chap. 4. ver. 2. *Ye have not, becauſe ye ask not.* In the Sixth of *Matthew* our Lord has ſet us a *Pattern* of *Prayer*, and commanded us to uſe it, *When we Pray, ſay Our Father*, &c. And he ſpake the Parable we are now diſcourſing on, to this very purpoſe, *That men ought always to Pray, and not to faint*; and he himſelf was our *Example* too in this Matter, and *continued whole Nights in Prayer unto God*, and his Example in Things within our reach, as aſſiduous Prayer is, we are upon innumerable Accounts obliged to follow.

And as our Lord, ſo his Apoſtles bind this upon us as our *Duty*. Thus St. *Paul* bids us *in every thing by Prayer and Supplication with Thankſgiving, to let our Requeſts be made known unto God*; and to *continue in Prayer*, and *watch in the ſame with all Perſeverance, and to Pray every where, and without ceaſing.* Phil. 4. 6. Col. 4. 2. Eph. 6 18. 1 Tim. 2. 8. 1 Theſ. 5. 17.

The Duty, we ſee, is ſufficiently bound upon us by our Holy Religion: 'Tis plain and expreſs, and muſt as carefully be obſerv'd as any other Command; ſo *ſollicitous* is our good God for our Happineſs, as by all means to bring us to the Practice of what will be ſo highly

highly *beneficial* to us; And where the *Love* of a Thing, upon Account of its *own Excellency* and Serviceableness to our *Selves*, will not attract our numbb'd senseless Souls, there to *goad* and prick us on, and even *force* us to it, by Threats of Punishment if we refuse. Good God! That Men should need *haling* to Felicity! And that *God* should be so desirous of it, as thus to take all Measures to bring us to it! O the unaccountable *Stupidity* of Man, and the unsearchable Riches of the Goodness of God!

And what a miserable Wretch is he, unnatural to himself, and Ungrateful to his God, who by his Obstinacy shall frustrate so great Tenderness of God as this, and break through so many Obligations to his own Ruin! and with Devilish Pride and Sullenness starve and famish his Soul, rather than Pray to God to Relieve and Help him! How many of those that call Themselves Christians are thus wretchedly miserable, God and their own Consciences know best; but let not any Man be deceiv'd; 'tis not only a *Privilege* now, but is become a *necessary Duty*, and by the Neglect of it we shall not only lose the Benefit consequent upon the Performance of it, but receive the Punishment due to the Breach of the Laws of God; which in all probability, will be so much the more *severe*, as the *Benefit* would have been *great*. For nothing is more provoking, than to have great Favours and Condescensions

deſcenſions (ſuch as is this) ſlighted and deſpis'd. And thus much may ſuffice to prove, that Prayer is not only the *Privilege*, but the *Duty* of every Chriſtian. I proceed in the

Second Place, to ſhew, How *far* the Obligation to this Duty does *extend*. Our Lord in the Proeme to this Parable, ſays, That Men ought *always* to pray; and St. *Paul*, 1 *Tim.* 2. 8. ſays, *I will that Men pray every where*, ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ, in every Place; and *Epheſ.* 6. 18, ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ, upon every Occaſion, with every Opportunity; and 1 *Theſſ.* 5. 17. he joyns both together, and commands that we pray Ἀδιαλείπτως, without Intermiſſion. So that 'tis a Duty that extends to all *Times* and *Places*, to all *Seaſons*, and *States* and Conditions of Life; and as at all Times we ſtand in *need* of the Favour and Bleſſing, the Protection and Support, the Mercy and Forgiveneſs of God; ſo 'tis at all Times our Duty to beſeech it of him. But this will need a farther Explication.

For this Praying without *ceaſing* or Intermiſſion, cannot be underſtood in the ſtricteſt Senſe, as if there were to be no Ceſſation of the *Act*, for that would be impoſſible; and there are many other Things that we are as much oblig'd to, which will take up great Portions of our Time. Many Neceſſities of Nature there are that muſt be adverted to and ſupplied, many honeſt Employments that muſt be followed, many other Chriſtian Graces

that must be exercised, and sometimes even innocent *Recreations* must take place; there being, as *Solomon* says, *a Time for all Things, a Time to Weep, and a Time to Laugh, a Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance. This*, as well as other *Affirmative* Commands, does, *Obligare semper*, as the Schools distinguish, but not *pro semper*; that is, There is no Time, or Season, or Place so exempt, but that in due Circumstances we are oblig'd to this Duty, but it does not oblige as *Negative* Commands do, to *every Moment*, without any Exception There is no Minute of our Life, but the Commands, *Thou shalt do no Murder*, *Thou shalt not commit Adultery*, *Thou shalt not Steal*, and the like, do oblige us to observe them; but there are very many Portions of our Time wherein such Precepts as these, *Be Afflicted, and Mourn, and Weep*, and the contrary to it, *Rejoyce evermore*, and *Pray without ceasing*, and the like, neither do nor can oblige. To keep our Minds in an habitual Frame and apt Disposition for the Performance of these Duties in proper Circumstances, is all that is expected from us. But more particularly, to Pray *always*, or every where, and without ceasing, is to do these Three Things:

First, 'Tis to be very frequent in offering up pious *Ejaculations*, or short *mental* Prayers, as Occasion shall offer, which will be very often; and the most usual and common Occurences of Life may be improv'd to this sort of

of Devotion, without the leaſt Hindrance or Encroachment upon any other Employments. In the Field, in the Shop, in the Bed when Sleep departs, in a Journey, every where, and at all Times, this may be done, without Expence of Time, without *Shew* or Obſervation; and is a Service highly acceptable to God, and keeps the Mind in an excellent Frame and Temper, and is out of Danger of being polluted by *Hypocriſie* and other baſe and little Ends; which too often mingle with our more *ſet* and *publick* Prayers. And the Soul may more *vigorouſly* dart forth theſe ſhort Accidental Breathings, and ſtorm Heaven more ſucceſsfully by theſe quick lively Efforts, than by whole Armies of Words and Legions of long-breath'd Petitions, which are rather apt to *tire* the Soul, and rebate the Edge of her Devotion.

Of this Nature is the Prayer which our Lord has taught the *Church*; the *whole* far from *long*, and the *particular* Petitions very *ſhort*, but withal *full* and *comprehenſive* to Admiration: In Imitation whereof, have the wiſe Compilers of our Liturgy divided the Service into ſhort *Collects*, and compriſed their Senſe in as few Words as is poſſible; that ſo the Mind may be more *intent* and recollect, and have time to *breathe* as 'twere between each of them, and return with *freſh* Vigour and Spirit to the ſucceeding parts; according to our Lord's expreſs Advice, *Uſe not vain*

Repetitions when ye pray; and that of the Wise Preacher, *Eccl.* 5. 2. *Be not rash with thy Mouth, and let not thine Heart be hasty to utter any Thing before God, for God is in Heaven, and thou upon Earth, therefore let thy Words be few.* And this way of *Ejaculatory* Devotion comes very near to *Praying without ceasing* in the strictest Sense, and much resembles that Heavenly Employment of those, *Rev.* 4. 8. *Who rest not Night and Day, saying Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.* But,

Secondly, To Pray always, is never willingly to omit the Morning, and Evening, and Noon-day Returns, of our more *set* and solemn private Addresses to the Throne of Grace; the Morning and Evening especially, which is the least Homage we can pay to the Almighty, and which are Seasons the most of all in our power, to employ as we think fit.

The Morning and Evening Sacrifice was constant among the *Jews*; the Fire was ever Burning upon the Altar, and never was suffer'd to go out. *David* pray'd Morning and Evening, and at Noon, and God heard his Voice; yea, seven Times a Day did he praise him because of his Righteous Judgments: and *Daniel* made his Petition three Times a Day towards *Jerusalem*, as the *Jews* Custom was.

The Morning and Evening are the two *Extremes* of the Day, and the *Noon* is like an

intermediate

intermediate Link between them, that is join'd to both, and ſo makes one continued Day; ſo that, he that prays *Morning* and *Evening*, and at *Noon*, may not improperly be ſaid to ſpend the *Day* in Prayer, and to continue *inſtant* in it. And how very fitting it is, that theſe Returns ſhould without any wilful Intermiſſion be obſerv'd, will ſoon appear to any one that *conſiders*.

For Firſt, As for our private *Morning* Devotions, our Preſervation from the Dangers of the Night paſt, God's careful watching over us while we ſlept, and lengthning out our Opportunity for Repentance, and making Proviſion for a Better Life, ought certainly to bring us upon our Knees, in humble *Adoration* of that Good God *in whom we live, and move, and have our Beings*; in humble *Submiſſion to his Providence* for the Future, and devout *Oblation* of our whole *Selves*, and our whole *Time*, to *His* Service, who has continu'd to us *Life, and Health, and all Things*. And, ſince all our Sufficiency is of God, and we can do no good Thing, nor ſo much as think a good Thought, *without* him; to beg his Bleſſed preſence with us, That he would work in us to will and to do according to his Good pleaſure; That he would guide and protect us, and bleſs and proſper our honeſt Undertakings, and ſtill continue to watch over us for Good; That we may be undefil'd by the Temptations of the Day, and look back

with Comfort upon our Actions, when we cast up our Accounts at Night.

2. As for our *Mid-day* Devotions, because we are then in the midst of the Dangers and Temptations of the Day, beset on every side with Allurements to do Evil; 'twill highly concern us *afresh* to beg the Divine Aid and Support, that we may stand upright. If we have pass'd securely the former part of the Day, it becomes us to pay our humble Acknowledgments to our Divine Guardian and Guide; and if we have *fallen*, it becomes us with Shame and Sorrow to confess our Vileness, and deprecate God's Anger, and beg his Grace, that we may be more circumspect the *Remainder* of it. And besides, the Works of the Creation, the wonderful Order of the Universe, the Variety, Beauty, and Usefulness of the Creatures, and the plentiful Provision God hath made for all our Necessities; will then be very proper to engage our Thoughts, and will minister abundant Matter for Devotion, and be very apt to fill our Breasts with Holy Breathings and Aspirations towards that inexhaustible Fountain of Beauty and Perfection, and Power infinite, who by his Word spake all this into Being.

3. And for Prayer at *Evening*, our *Protection* from the many evil Accidents, and the many great *Blessings* of the Day past; the *Miscarriages* likewise and *Failures* of it, if no *worse*, and the Dangers of the approaching Night, are sufficient

cient Motives and Engagements to renew our devout Addresses to the Almighty.

And as *private* Prayer ought to be thus constant, and without wilful Intermission; so, and more especially, no Opportunity of praying to God in the publick Congregation should be omitted: For, this Attendance upon the *publick* Worship of God, is that which is chiefly and primarily intended by the Apostles in what they wrote about this Duty of Prayer. Most part of the first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, is spent in giving Directions for the more decent Management of the *publick* Service of God; and 1 *Tim.* 2. 8. the Command of Praying ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ *in every place*, and that *Eph.* 6. 18. ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ, *upon every opportunity*, must primarily relate to the *publick*, as any capable Person may perceive, by considering the Context.

And accordingly, those Converts made by S. *Peter*, Acts 2. 42. *Continu'd stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship and in breaking Bread and in Prayers*; and v. 46. *They continu'd daily in the Temple with on Accord*; and on the Day of *Pentecost* we find them *all with one accord in one place*, Acts 2. 1. And thus it was in all Ages of the Church, till Iniquity abounded, and the Love of many began to wax cold. But methinks, the Consideration of the great *Advantages* of these *Publick* Devotions above the Private, should have some Influence upon us, in order to our more constant

Attendance at the places of Divine Worship; for our Lord has expressly promis'd his Presence there, and that the Prayers there offer'd shall be successful. Thus *Mat.* 18. 19. *I say unto you*, says he, *that if two of you shall agree on Earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven; for where two or three are gather'd together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.* The *Church* is an Emblem of *Heaven*, and the *Congregation* of the *General Assembly of the First-born which are written there*; whose happy Employment is, to Admire, Adore, and Extol the Infinite Mercy and Majesty of God, for ever and ever; and as there, so here, the Devotion of others will raise our Affections and their Zeal and Fervor quicken our Devotion. To which purpose is that of the Apostle *Heb.* 10 24, 25. *Not forsaking the Assembling of your selves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and provoking to Love and Good Works*, by pious Example and devout Behaviour in the Church. And the *Blessing* pronounc'd by the Minister at the Close of those publick Offices, was in the Primitive Times thought a Thing of no mean Regard, whatever low Thoughts Men now-a-days may have of it.

To this Head of *Publick* Prayer, may be reduc'd the Assembling of a *Family* together to offer up their joint Petitions to God; whether by the chief of the Family, or by some Minister

ſter of Religion, if preſent: And this has been a Practice of very long ſtanding, and is of excellent Uſe.

It keeps a Family in a ſerious Senſe of Religion; it accuſtoms Youth to it betimes, and is an excellent Example to Children and Servants, who are apt to mark and imitate their Parents and Maſters Steps more than they are aware of; and Young People will be incliu'd to think, there is ſomething more than ordinary in Religion, when they ſee thoſe, of whoſe Prudence and Experience they have an Opinion, ſo ſeriouſly ſet about it.

The Returns of theſe Family-Devotions at the *Beginning* and *Cloſe* of the Day, ought not without good Reaſon to be omitted; for they naturally tend to make People more *Induſtrious* and *Juſt* in their Dealings in the World, as keeping us in their Minds a ſenſe of their Being in the Sight and Preſence of a Juſt and Holy God, and to prevent Abundance of Folly and Levity, and Looſeneſs of Manners, and make the Days Sober and Honeſt, and the Nights Innocent and Chaſte. And this appears evidently to be true, in the great Difference any Man may diſcern between Families where this Holy Cuſtom *is*, and is *not* obſerv'd; Idleneſs and Lazineſs, Pilfering and Cheating, Swearing and Lying, Lewdneſs and Intemperance, and Debauchery of all ſorts, generally where 'tis neglected; and good Order, Modeſty, and Sobriety,

Diligence and Faithfulness where 'tis observ'd. For, it tending so much as it evidently does, to the making Men *Good Christians*; it consequently, must needs tend to the making them good in every Relation.

These solemn Family Devotions, are likewise a very good preparation for the better performance of the more publick Offices in the great Congregation. For they tend to create that habitual Seriousness and Recollection of Thought, which our *publick* Prayers command, and without which, we shall offer but the Sacrifice of Fools. The more Men are affected with the Prayers of a Family at home, the more sacred and awful will the *publick* Service in the House of God appear to them; if attentive and devout *there*, much more so *here*; and the more they feel the Comfort of joint Devotions in their own Houses, the more desirous will they be of, and the more benefited and refreshed by, the Harmony of a full Choir of Saints in the Holy Temple.

I'm afraid this pious Custom is now-a-days too much neglected; some grudging to take so much *Time* from their *other* Employments as this Duty requires; and others, on Evenings especially, making themselves *unfit* for the Performance of it by *tarrying long at the Wine, and enflaming themselves with Strong Drink*; and some truly, thinking it too *precise* and *Puritanical* a Thing, to be practis'd now-a-days.

But

But theſe *laſt* ſhould have a Care how they throw ill Names upon what our Religion has made our *Duty*, and what has all along been obſerv'd by the beſt Men in the World; and they would do well to conſider thoſe Words of our Lord, *Mark* 8. 38. *Whoſoever ſhall be aſham'd of me and my Words in this adulterous and ſinful Generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of Man be aſham'd when he cometh in the Glory of his Father and of the Holy Angels.*

Is it a fitting Reaſon, that a thing ſo excellent as this ſhould be deſpis'd and diſus'd, becauſe thoſe that in other Matters diſſent from us, are ſo careful to obſerve it? Let their Piety in this Inſtance, rather ſhame us into Amendment that we may be behind them in no Good Work, and leave them no Occaſion of Caviling and making Objections againſt our Church, by reaſon of the careleſs *indifferent* Religion of ſome that are of our Communion. In particular, this Neglect of *Family-Devotions* is often thrown in our Teeth; and the beſt way to take off the Aſperſion, is heartily to to ſet about the Practice of the Duty.

'Tis our great Happineſs, were we duly ſenſible of it that we are Members of the moſt Primitive Church in the World, and the greateſt Encourager of True Piety and Religion; and methinks we ſhould be very careful, had we any love for this Church, any deſire it ſhould flouriſh and proſper, not to diſparage it by our ſo *diſagreeable* Converſation.

tion. Other Sects and Parties we see extraordinary diligent to gain Honour and Reputation, by all means, to their Profession, that their Antagonists may discover no Flaw or Indecency, no Breach of the Orders and Customs they have embrac'd; while we, that have the best *Cause*, are generally the worst *Managers* of it. For Shame, let us at length grow *wise*, and *live up* to what we *profess* in this and every other Particular; and transcribe the excellent Rules of our Church, in our Conversation; let us *act* like true Sons of the *Church of England*, as well as *talk* as such; and then no doubt but God and his Truth will prevail. *We* are as a City built upon a Hill, a Light set in an eminent Place, many envious Eyes are upon us, and rejoyce to see our Taper burn dim, and our City defil'd by Wickedness and Impurity; wherefore we should be the more careful to *trim* our Lamps, and purge out our Stains, and shine brightly, in the midst of a crooked and perverse Generation: That these Men seeing our good Works, may at length glorifie our Heavenly Father, by a Hearty Union and Communion with us, and return to the Fold which they have so groundlesly deserted.

As for such as grudge *Time* for this Duty of praying in their Families, let them consider, whether they can indeed improve it more to their *Advantage*; whether the Gain of a little Money is to be compar'd to having

the

the Bleſſing of God, and the Guidance and Protection of his good Providence: And whether their Time was not chiefly given them to worſhip God in, and to make proviſion for another World.

And as for ſuch that make themſelves unfit for this Holy Duty, by *Night Revels* and *Intemperance*, they can't but be ſenſible that that's a very ill Excuſe, ſuch as they ſhould bluſh and be aſham'd of, and a Fault which highly concerns them ſpeedily to amend; remembring that Drunkards are in that black Liſt, of ſuch as *ſhall not enter into the Kingdom of Chriſt and of God*, 1 Cor. 6. 10.

Having thus ſhewn that Prayer is not only the *Priviledge*, but the *Duty* of a Chriſtian, and how *far* the Obligation to this Duty does *extend*, I Proceed to the

Third and *laſt* thing to be done, which is, to ſhew what is requir'd in order to the *effectual* Performance of this Duty; and what St. *Paul* ſays, 1 *Tim.* 2. 8. added to the *Importunity* recommended in the Parable we are now diſcourſing upon, will doubtleſs make our Prayers to be *availing*. The Apoſtles words are theſe, *I will that Men pray every where, lifting up Holy Hands without Wrath and doubting*; and of theſe Requiſites I ſhall firſt diſcourſe, and then of *Importunity*.

Firſt If we would be accepted at the Throne of Grace, we muſt lift up *Holy* Hands. The

Word

Word in the Original signifies pure and undefil'd, and 'tis an Allusion to the Custom of the Jews, who constantly us'd the Ceremony of *washing* before they pray'd; which was intended to signifie the Necessity of a *clean Heart*, in order to Acceptance with God, For God is a Being Infinitely *Pure* and *Holy*, and that cannot behold Iniquity, and into whose Presence no *unclean* thing can enter; and therefore, *the Sacrifice of the Wicked*, as *Solomon* observes, must needs be *an Abomination to him*, and bring down a Curse rather then a Blessing; and the *Prayer of the upright* only *his Delight*. Prov. 15. 8. More particularly, by this Expression of lifting up *Holy Hands* is meant these *three* Qualifications.

First, That the Suppliant be one of a *good Life*, or if he has not formerly been so, *repents* and is sincerely resolv'd to live as becomes the Gospel of Christ, for the future. For how can he that is a Rebel to God, a Traytor, and *Judas* to his Saviour, and that will obey none but the Devil and his own vile Lusts; how can such a one think that God should hearken to his Requests, who *consumes* God's Blessings *upon his Lusts*, as St. *James* expresses it Jam. 4. 3. and as St. *Paul*, Turns the *Grace of God into Lasciviousness*, and sins still more that *Grace may still abound*; and is encourag'd by Gods Goodness to persist in his Wickedness? He only can with Reason

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expect to be heard by a *Holy* God who is either actually pious and good, or heartily deſires and intends to be ſo.

Secondly, By lifting up Holy Hands, is meant *Purity of Intention*, unmix'd Deſires of advancing the Glory of God, and of the Supply of our real Needs, and of promoteing our Eternal Salvation.

That is, no man muſt dare to play the *Hypocrite* in his Devotion, and have other little ſiniſter *By*-Ends, ſuch as the Praiſe of Men, that his Vanity may be tickled by being eſteem'd more Righteous and Heavenly-minded than his Neighbours; and that under the Cover of more Religion than ordinary, he may the more ſecurely bring to paſs ſome wicked under-hand Deſign. That there have been ſuch ſort of Devotioniſts as theſe, is evident from what we find recorded of the *Phariſees*, Men to all appearance extraordinary Religious, Faſting and Praying *frequently* and *long*, and very Exemplary in other Inſtances of Piety; when after all, our Lord who knew their *Hearts*, has told us, they did it to be *ſeen*, *and to have Praiſe of Men*; and under Pretence of long Prayers to inſinuate into Wealthy Widows Eſteem, that at length they might have Opportunity to *devour their Houſes*. How many of this ſort there is now-a-days, God and their own Conſciences know beſt; but this is certain that where-ever the Guilt lies, 'tis a great

Abomination

Abomination to him, who is *Truth* it self. and infinitely hates a *Lye*; especially in matters of *Religion*, where his *Honour* is so nearly concern'd

Wherefore, let those who find themselves prick'd by what is now said, take care that their Religion be more pure and *sincere* for the Future; least our Lords Woes to the Pharisees fall upon their Heads, and they be doom'd to the Portion of Hypocrites, *where is Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth.*

Thirdly, The Word תֹּם, sometimes signifies *Just* and *Upright*, without Fraud and Cheating Arts and Oppression; and he that would be heard when he prays, must cleanse his Hands from these, must do as he would be done to, and *provide things honest in the Sight of all Men*; and despise the Gain of of Oppression, *Isaiah* phrases it, Chap. 33. Vers. 15. *For* God is *Just* as well as Holy, and hates the sly Windings of Deceit and Fraud; *He is about our Path, and spieth out all our Ways*, and will be a *swift Witness against those that oppress* instead of turning *a gracious Ear* to their Petitions. *Wherefore, let no Man go beyond or defraud his Brother in any Matter, for God is the Avenger of all such*; 1 *Thess.* 4. 6. but take care that his Hands be not defil'd with *unjust* Gain, least it make them uncapable of receiving a Blessing. Thus much for the first Requisite to our praying *effectually*, the *lifting up Holy Hands.*

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A ſecond is, That this be done *without Wrath*, that there be a Freedom from *Strife* and *Revenge*, and a Readineſs to *Reconciliation* and *Forgiveneſs*.

For as for a hot *angry* Diſpoſition, nothing more unfits a Man for Devotion than that; it makes the Mind continually in a *Storm*, breaks the Order and Connexion of Thoughts, puts the whole Soul into a Hurry, and makes it like a *Troubled Sea that cannot reſt*. And therefore, no wonder if it *caſt up Mire and Dirt*, Deſires impure and diſpleaſing to God, rather than the ſweet ſmelling Savour of an acceptable Sacrifice.

As our Religion in general, ſo Prayer in particular, is a *reaſonable* Service, and requires as great *Freedom* of Thought, and recollected Preſence of Mind, as any thing whatever. The *Object* of Prayer, is a Being of infinite *Sanctity*, and tranſcendent *Majeſty*, and this ſhould move us to approach him with the moſt awful and ſedate Temper of Mind; and that which is *pray'd for*, is, or ought to be of the greateſt Value, and which it moſt of all concerns us, to have beſtow'd upon us; and therefore it concerns us to have our Reaſon and Thoughts at *Command*, leſt our Petition ſhould be *rejected* for our ill *Management* of it.

Now, nothing more *diſcompoſes* the Mind, and deprives it of the Uſe of Reaſon, than the Paſſion of *Anger*: It puts the Spirits into ſuch

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a violent and unnatural Motion, as makes all the *Powers* of the Soul for a Time *unserviceable*. Things are *apprehended* in strange *Confusion* and Disorder, and *remembred* with much Imperfection, and foolish and ridiculous *Choices* are made by the *Will*; and all the *Affections*, consequently, out of Course: Just as is the Condition of *Mad* Men, only the Fit is sooner over. And is this a fitting Temper of Mind to approach the Throne of the *great God* in, and prefer Petitions for the greatest Blessings? Let a Man after he has been brawling with his Neighbours, consider if he were to go immediately to beg a Boon of his *Prince*, whether he should not *then* do it with great *disadvantage*; how apt he should then be to commit Indecencies, and to omit Matters of chief Concern in his Request, and the like; and then let him say what he thinks of addressing to the great *King of Heaven* in such an ill *Disguise* of Soul? And whether he does not believe that he might speed much better, if his Mind were *calmer* and more it *self*? Now, the Returns of *Prayer* being so frequent, and angry Mens Brawlings and *Quarrellings* so frequent, it must needs often be, that such Men, unless they *omit* praying, which is still worse, must pray to God with Minds greatly discompos'd, and unfit for the Performance of so Holy a Duty, at least with any Success.

As for a *Revengeful* Temper of Mind, that is a thing so *contrary* to him, whose Definition

is

is Love, and who has ſo freely forgiven us ſo infinite a Debt, that no Deſires breath'd from *ſuch* a Soul, but muſt needs ſtink in his Noſtrils, and be utterly rejected by him. His Divine Son, the only *Mediator* between him, and us, who preſents the Prayers of the Faithful, and intercedes for their Acceptance; will be ſo far from appearing in an implacable revengeful Man's Behalf, that he has declar'd (in a Parable before discours'd of, *Mat.* 18. 23.) he will deal with ſuch with the utmoſt Severity. God will accept nothing at our Hands without *Charity*, and a Gift, though brought to the Altar, muſt not be offer'd there, till he that is at Variance with his Brother be *reconcil'd* to him; he muſt *leave his Gift before the Altar, and go his Way, and firſt be reconcil'd to his Brother, and then come and offer his Gift*, Mat. 5. 23, 24.

A third Requiſite to our praying *ſucceſsfully*, is, that our Prayers be without *doubting*, or as 'tis expreſs'd, *Heb.* 22. *In full aſſurance of Faith.* According to what our Lord ſaid upon Occaſion of the Barren Fig-Tree's being dry'd up from the Roots at his Word, which, when St. *Peter* and the reſt of the Diſciples wondred at; *Jeſus anſwer'd and ſaid unto them, have Faith in God. for verily I ſay unto you, whoſoever ſhall ſay unto this Mountain, be thou remov'd and caſt into the Sea, and ſhall not doubt in his Heart, but believe that thoſe things he ſaith, ſhall come to paſs; he ſhall have whatſoever he ſaith. There-*

fore, I say unto you, what things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. Mark 11. 20. And elsewhere, *All things are possible to him that believeth.* Mark 9. 23. To which agrees that of St. *James*, *If any Man lack Wisdom, let him ask of God; but let him ask in Faith, nothing wavering, for such a Man shall not receive any thing of the Lord,* James 1. 5, 6. The meaning of all which I suppose to be this, That, as the Apostles, upon their firm Belief of the *Truth* of our Lords *Promise* of enabling them to work Miracles for the Advancement of the Christian Religion, and of his *Power* to do accordingly, should, when they pray'd for his Help, be enabl'd to do as they desired; so all other Believers, if their Prayers are accompanied with a strong *Belief* of his *Veracity* in promising to hear the Prayers of the Faithful, of his *Ability* to relieve and help them, and of his infinite *Goodness* and *Willingness* to grant them their Desires, if it be *expedient* for them, they shall certainly speed well and receive a Blessing at the Hand of God.

The *very* Petitions they offer up, if for their *Good*, shall be granted them; and if *not* for their Good, God in his infinite Wisdom will bestow something else upon them, that shall be more for their Advantage: And, they may *depend* upon it, they shall not be sent away empty.

But, he that *wavereth*, and is of *doubtful* Mind in these particulars, and prays with great

that exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed, and he that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted. A truly *humble Temper of Mind* is better than all the outward performances of Religion; and a penitent *Publican*, that is indeed *poor in Spirit*, is far more eſteemed of God, than he that makes Long Prayers, and Faſts often, and Tithes all his Subſtance, and is *proud* of this when he has done, and *deſpiſes* thoſe that make not ſo much *Oſtentation* of Religion as he does. Without *Humility*, all is *Vain-glory* and *Hypocriſie*; and the ſeemingly moſt *ſanctified* Perſon that has it not, is like a *painted Sepulchre*, beautiful *without*, but full of Rottenneſs *within*.

By what has been hitherto ſaid by Way of *Comment* upon this Parable, and from the Introduction and Concluſion of it (as was ſaid) 'tis very plain that 'tis deſign'd to recommend the great, nay, fundamental Grace of *Spiritual Humility*, or Poverty of Spirit with relation to *Vertue*: And to ſhew, that let a Man have never ſo much of Vertue or Religion, if he is *proud* of it, it renders all abominable in the ſight of God; and that none but the *humble Soul is his Delight*. In my Diſcourſe therefore upon this Parable, I ſhall endeavour *three* things;

Firſt, To ſhew what the Grace of *Spiritual Humility* is;

Secondly, How *excellent* and *beneficial* a Grace it is, and how *vile* and *miſchievous* the contrary *Vice* is; and

Thirdly, How highly this Vertue ſhall be *rewarded*.

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As for the first, What the Grace of Spiritual Humility is; I in the first place think in the *Negative*, that it can't be a thinking *worse* of a Man's self than he really deserves; for no Man certainly can be oblig'd by Religion to be *mistaken* in himself, it being one of the chief things that we learn in *Christianity* as well as *Ethicks*, rightly to *know ones self*: And when there is any thing in a Man that is indeed *Praise-worthy*, I can't see why the Man *himself* may not be sensible of it as well as *others*; and innocently *please* himself with reflecting upon it, and *love* what bears so much Resemblance to, and is an Emanation from the Eternal Fountain of Goodness and Perfection. Nay, he that *dwells* much with himself, and heedfully reflects upon his Actions, and the Bent and Inclination of his Mind, as every Man *ought* to do; can't be conceived to be ignorant of what is *good* in him, any more than what is *evil*; and the same Attention which is requisite that a Man may know his *Errors* and *Miscarriages*, will likewise inform him of what is *vertuous* in him, and of *good Report*. And further, How can a Man be *thankful* to him who is the Giver of every good and perfect Gift, for the *intellectual* Favours he bestows upon him (of which *Grace to live vertuously* is the chief) who is not first conscious that he has *receiv'd* the Blessing? The Elders in the Revelations that took their Crowns from their Heads, and cast them before the Throne as

an Acknowledgment from whom they had receiv'd them, firſt muſt be ſuppos'd to know that they had them *on*; And if there be ſuch a thing as St. *Peter* calls the *Anſwer of a good Conſcience towards God*, a Man muſt firſt be *ſenſible* of his good Actions, before he can feel that inward *Approbation* of them.

I thought fit to ſay thus much in the *Negative* about Spiritual Humility, becauſe it has been taught by ſome that pretend to the moſt *extraordinary* Religion, that we ought to entertain none but *vile* and *abject* Thoughts of our ſelves, to be conſcious of nothing that is *good* in us, but to call our ſelves the *vileſt* of *Sinners*, and the *worſt of Men*; according to St. *Paul*'s Example, who calls himſelf *the chief of Sinners*, 1 Tim. 1. 15. But ſince it cannot be true, for a ſincerely *pious*, *ſober*, and *chaſte* Man for Inſtance, to call himſelf the moſt *prophane*, the moſt *intemperate* and *debauch'd* Wretch living, for he muſt needs be ſenſible that is *not* ſo; therefore a more *diſcreet* Way of Humiliation and Confeſſion of our Faults ſhould be introduc'd in its Room, for nothing that is *untrue* can be pleaſing and acceptable unto God: And, as no Man ought to think of himſelf more *highly* than he ought to think, ſo neither ſhould he untruly *vilifie* and *miſcall* himſelf, but think and ſpeak *ſoberly*, *according as God has given to him the Meaſure of Faith.* 'Tis the ſame St. *Paul*'s Advice, *Rom.* 12. 3. whoſe Example is urg'd for ſo *extremely* de-

basing a Man's self in his own Esteem; and therefore, when *he* said of himself, That he was the *chief of Sinners*, it must look *back* to his former Wickedness in *persecuting the Church of Christ*, and could not be true as to his *present* Condition when he spoke it, for he was then a *chosen Vessel*, and *not inferiour to any of the Apostles*. And whatever *good* Man will use that Expression after him, its Signification must be *restrain'd*, either with Reference to *past* Wickednesses, or some particular Vice which too easily besets him; and cannot be true in its *largest* Sense, of any *sincerely good Man*. And 'tis a strange kind of Humiliation, that is made up of the Confession of Faults which a Man never knew himself to be guilty of; which yet is much in Vogue with some sort of People, but does indeed look too *Stage-like* to be thought real by any discerning Man.

Poverty of Spirit therefore does not consist in a Man's making himself *worse* than he is, (and truly there is no need he should do so, every Man living having enough of *real* Vileness to humble him before God) and in *overlooking* every thing that is *commendable* in him; and the *Pharisee* in the Parable might very *innocently* have *thank'd God that he was not as other Men*, Fornicators, Unjust, *Adulterers, or even as a Publican*; had there not been something much worse than this, mix'd with his Thanksgiving: And it was *this*. He was *proud* of his living more circumspectly than other

other Men, he arrogated much of the Praise to *himself*, and *despis'd* one, who, by reason of his *Profession*, he thought was a more loose and careless Liver; and never reflected upon his *Failures* and *Imperfections*, but was wholly taken up with *admiring* himself, and vaunting of his *Vertue*, and did not return, as he ought to have done, *all* the *Glory* to *God*. So that 'tis not *all* thinking *well* of ones Conversation and Virtuous Living that is *Spiritual Pride*, but only when we think *better* of it than we *should* do, and forget our *Sins* and Imperfections, or arrogantly ascribe the *Praise* to our *selves*, not remembring who made us to differ, and neglecting to return the Glory to *him*, and are so exalted in our own Conceits, as to despise and contemn others, because their Religion is not with *Shew* and *Ostentation*.

Spiritual Humility then, as 'tis oppos'd to this *Spiritual Pride* consists in two things.

First, In not *overvaluing* our spiritual Excellencies, nor our *selves* by reason of them, but returning all the *Praise* and *Glory* to *God*, who is the Author of every good and perfect gift.

'Tis to remember that *he* made us to *differ*, and that we have *nothing*, not so much as a good *Thought*, but what we receive from *him*, in whose Divine Aid is all our Sufficiency.

'Tis to reflect upon the Imperfections and Defects of even our *best* Actions, and how much Need there is of God's *Mercy* and *favour-*

able Judgment, after we have done all that we can in his Service. 'Tis to remember likewise, that with such great Assistances from above as we have receiv'd, we might have been much *better* than we are, and have practis'd *more Graces* of Christianity, and that in *higher Degrees* of *Perfection.*

And when there arises any inward Complacency in our Breasts from a Vertuous Action, or we meet with any commendation from others; 'tis then immediately to give *God* the *Glory*, and transfer all the *Praise* to him, and suffer no vain Tumours to remain upon our Minds, nor look down with Scorn upon others that have less Esteem and Reputation in the World: But rather to humble our selves before God at the Thoughts of the Pollutions that are still upon our Souls, and reflect how great a Debt of Gratitude lies upon us to our great Benefactor, who has given us (unworthy as we are) such great Measures of his Grace; and resolve to make him a due *return*, of a daily increasing *Praise*, and *Obedience*, and *Love.*

Secondly, Spiritual Humility consists in a due Apprehension of the *Vileness* of our *Sins*, and the great *Aggravations* of them; and as we must not *overvalue* our *Vertues*, nor our *selves* by Reason of them, so neither should we *undervalue* our *Vices*, *i. e.* endeavour to *palliate* and *excuse* them, and give them more *favourable* Names than they deserve, such as

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unavoidable *Frailties*, pitiable *Infirmities*, the Effects of *Surprize*, and the like: Nor think our ſelves to be *leſs* abominable in the Sight of God for our *Commiſſion* of them, than indeed we are.

There is no Man living, how *good* ſoever, but is ſtill a *Sinner*; and not only Imperfections and Frailties may be laid to his Charge, but God knows, too often, Sins of a *deeper* Dye; as *David* and *Peter*, we know, fell into the very worſt of Wickedneſſes, though the one, otherwiſe a *Man after God's own heart*; and the other an *Apoſtle* of our Lord and Holy *Martyr* for his Truth. Now *Spiritual Humility* will give a Man a due Senſe of his Spiritual *Vileneſs*, and repreſent his *Sin* (whatever it be) as indeed the greateſt Evil, a Violation of the higheſt Authority, and of a moſt Holy, and Juſt, and Good Law, and the very heighth of *Ingratitude* too, as being a Reſiſting the Will of our greateſt *Friend* and *Benefactor*: And 'twill ſhew him the *Aggravations* of his Guilt, as being contracted againſt ſufficient Light and *Knowledge*, and when he had ſufficient Aid likewiſe from Above to enable him to *reſiſt* the Temptations to it if he would. Theſe, and the like Conſiderations, which a Man truly *humble in Spirit* will call to mind, will humble him ſtill more, and render him as vile in his *own* Eyes as he thinks he is in *God*'s; and make him proſtrate himſelf before the Throne of the Divine Majeſty with Shame and Sorrow, and Confuſion of Face,

confessing his Guilt, *condemning* himself for it, and humbly imploring *Forgiveness* of his offended God, and that he would turn away that fierce Anger from him, which he is very sensible he has but too much *deserv'd*.

Thus *David* fram'd a Psalm on purpose to confess and bewail his great Transgressions in the Matter of *Uriah*: He then forgot all that was good in him, and did not expect that his former excellent Piety should cover and make Amends for those foul Sins: He did not search for *Excuses*, and endeavour to extenuate his Guilt; but, like a truly humble Penitent, chang'd his usual Strain of Praise and *Thanksgiving*, for the Accents of *Grief* and *Shame*, and bitter *Remorse*, *acknowledging* his Transgressions, having his Sins ever before him, and with the most pathetick Earnestness of a *broken and contrite Heart*, begging God's Forgiveness, and that he would again *Create in him a clean Heart and renew a right Spirit within him*: As if those his great Wickednesses had not only polluted all that before was good in him, but quite *destroy'd* the Rectitude and Integrity of his Soul.

And as *David*, so St. *Peter*, when he reflected upon the great Baseness of Denying his divine Master and Saviour, his spirit was so truly humbled, that without endeavouring in the least to conceal or palliate his Fault, *he went out and wept bitterly*.

And so the *Publican* in the Parable, would not

not ſo much as *lift up his Eyes to Heaven*, but ſtood *afar off*, in the Court of the *Gentiles* which was the loweſt of all, and with great Compunction of Spirit *ſmote upon his Breaſt, and ſaid, God be merciful to me a Sinner!*

And thus much for the *Firſt Thing* to be done upon this Parable, which was, to ſhew what the Grace of *Spiritual Humility* is; (*viz.*) a not *Over-valuing our ſpiritual Excellencies*, nor *our Selves* by reaſon of them, nor *deſpiſing others* as *leſs* Holy, but returning all the *Glory* to *God*, who made us to *differ*; nor *undervaluing*, or endeavouring to excuſe and *extenuate* our *Wickedneſſes*; but an impartial conſidering the *Vileneſs* and great *Aggravations* of them, and ſincere *humbling* our Selves for them at the Throne of God.

The *Second Thing* to be done is, to ſhew how *excellent* and *beneficial* this *Vertue* is in our Chriſtian Courſe, and how *vile* and *miſchievous* the contrary *Vice* is.

'Tis a ſufficient Argument that this Vertue is very excellent, and of great Benefit to Chriſtians, that our Lord has plac'd it in the *Front* of his *Beatitudes*, which he begins thus, *Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit.* Like a wiſe Maſter-builder, he lays the Foundation *low* of a Building that was to reach ſo very *high*; and *Humbleneſs of Mind* muſt be the *Ground-work* of that Religion which will advance a Man to *Heaven.*

Piety without Humility is very apt to make Men top-heavy, and over-ſet like a Ship without her Ballaſt; 'tis this that preſerves

the *Soul* unshaken amidst the *Temptations* of the World, as that makes a *Ship* sail *sure* and *steady* amidst the *mighty Billows*. The House in the Gospel that was founded upon a *sandy Surface* of the Earth, soon yielded to the Fury of the Tempest, and great was the Fall of it; our Lord therefore begins with *poverty of Spirit*, as the *Basis* and great *security* of all his other Building; which he foresaw and foretold was to undergo the Shock of many a furious *Storm*, and contend with all the Powers of the Prince of Darkness. But more *particularly*, this Grace of *Spiritual Humility* is so excellent and highly beneficial, that nothing *more* conduces to a Mans *Spiritual growth*, and Encrease in Vertue, nor renders him more *dear* both to God and Man.

First, Nothing more conduces to a Man's *spiritual growth*, and Encrease in Vertue. For, 'tis very true in *Religion* as well as in *Worldly Affairs*, That nothing makes Men more *industrious* than a due sense of their *Wants*, and the *poorness* of their *Stock*; whereas, when a Man thinks he has *Abundance*, he is generally Sloathful and Careless, and *Impoverishment* becomes his Lot rather than a farther *Improvement*: An humble Sense of a Man's *Imperfections* and *Sins*, will make him *doubly diligent*, and consequently to *improve* greatly in the School of Righteousness; but haughty *Conceitedness* will certainly make him grow *worse and worse*. Nay, there will be no *End* of the *humble minded* Man's

Man's Improvement; for 'tis always found in the purſuit of *Vertue* as well as of *Knowledge*, that the more *real* Vertue *increaſes* in the Soul of a Good Man, the more and greater the *Defects* of his Vertue appear to be, and conſequently, the more will his *Diligence* be quickned and ſpurr'd on; as St. *Paul*, the farther he advanced in the Chriſtian Race, the more conſcious he grew that he had not yet apprehended what he endeavoured after, and was not yet perfect; and that made him forget what was *behind*, his *former* Attainments, and reach out to what was ſtill *before*, what he had not yet attain'd to, and *eagerly preſs forward* to the Mark, the Priſe of the High Calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus. Now the Conſequence of this extraordinary *Diligence* muſt needs be an extraordinary *growth* and *increaſe*, and ſo ſtill *onward* in a quick and vigorous Motion, till he finiſhes his Vertuous Race, and is *perfect as his Father which is in Heaven is perfect.*

And as this *ſpiritual Humility* makes a Man move *ſwiftly* in the Chriſtian Courſe, ſo it makes him tread *ſurely* too, it ballances him, and keeps him upon his Centre, and ſecures him from thoſe dangerous *Falls* which too often are the Fate of the *high-minded and proud*; for 'twas Pride and Haughtineſs of Spirit, we know, that ruin'd the Prince of the Fallen Angels, and his Accomplices. But *poverty of Spirit* is the great Security of a Chriſtian againſt the ſubtle Arts of the Tempter; 'tis the proper Mark

Mark and Character of a Disciple of the meek, lowly Jesus; and is a disposition of Mind the most of all apt for *Repentance*, which is a Grace of infinite Value, as being absolutely *necessary to Salvation*; and entitles a Man, in a peculiar manner, to the Divine Aid and Assistance; *for God giveth Grace to the Humble.*

Secondly, As this *spiritual Humility* is of the greatest *Benefit* to a Christian, so does it render him highly *dear* both to *God* and *Man.*

All men love an *humble* Man, and look upon him as a Wise and Extraordinary Person; and he that is pious and circumspect in his Conversation, and yet is not *proud* of it, nor despises or haughtily reflects upon others that live more at *large* then he does, but advises them better, *seasonably*, and with *Meekness* and *Humility*; such a Man is esteem'd as a Person sent from God to do Good to Mankind, that seeing his Good Works mix'd with *poverty of Spirit*, they may be inclined to imitate so lovely an Example, and glorifie their Father which is in Heaven, by treading in *his* Steps. And as for *God*, S. *Peter* and S. *James*, and the Wisest of Men all agree, that *he resisteth the proud, but giveth Grace to the humble.* And *our Lord* himself, at the end of the Parable we are now considering, says expressly, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*; and the *humble Publican* went down to his House justified, rather than the

haughty

haughty Pharisee; so *beneficial* and highly *valuable* both with *God* and *Man*, is *Humility of Spirit*.

But on the contrary, to be *opinionated* and *proud* of ones Vertue, is a great *Misfortune* as well as *Fault*, and brings a great deal of a *peculiar* sort of Trouble and uneasiness along with it: 'Tis a Thing hated both by God and Men, and is despis'd and disgrac'd by every Body. To what would otherwise be really *praise-worthy*, it brings the greatest *Disparagement* in the World; and if a Man's Conversation be but *indifferent*, and like other Mens, then, nothing makes him more ridiculous, than much to *value* himself, upon what is of so little or no *Excellency*. And what a Pain 'tis for Men that look upon *themselves* as *extraordinary* Persons, to see others so *far* from that Opinion, as rather to *slight* and *depreciate* them; may easily be imagin'd. And indeed, 'tis the Mishap of this sort of People, always to meet with such kind of Entertainment as this; Men setting themselves on purpose to *tease* and *worry* 'em, that if possible, they may make them *ashamed*, and *weary* of a thing so generally *hated*.

But besides this *peculiar* sort of *Vexation* and *Uneasiness* that attends *Spiritual Pride*, there is something much worse to be said of it, *viz.* that 'tis almost impossible for Men infected with this Vice ever to *improve* in Religion and grow better. For in the *Nature* of the Thing,

nothing

nothing *slackens* Diligence and *Industry* more than this, without which no *progress* can be made in any thing, or at best a very slow one, especially where there are such Difficulties to be struggled with as in Religion; and what signifies Instruction or Reproof (unless it be to gall and enrage him) to a Man that thinks his Vertue very *extraordinary* if not *compleat* already? And besides, *God*, from whom we derive all our Sufficiency, *resists the proud*; and therefore, as *Solomon* says, no wonder if *when pride cometh then cometh Destruction, and a haughty Spirit be the forerunner of a fall.*

Besides, as the Condition of Mankind is *now*, to be proud of *Vertue* is to be proud of *Imperfection*; for such is the Vertue even of the *best* Men upon Earth: nay, 'tis to be proud of that which is *not*; for no Man that is *proud* of his Vertue is *indeed* Vertuous, that *poverty of Spirit* being wanting which gives the Value to all Religious Actions, and renders them acceptable in the Sight of God. And it not only pollutes and unhallows what might otherwise deserve the Name of Vertue, but (as was hinted before) it keeps a Man from growing better; it *blinds* him, that he cannot discern his Faults; and he is so taken up with admiring his *Excellencies*, and (with the *Pharisee*) *thanking God that he is not as other men are, Extortioners, Unjust, Adulterers*, or the like, that his great *Defects* pass unobserv'd by him: And with the Man in the Fable, he

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is ſo buſie in gazing upon things *above* himſelf, that he perceives not the Dangers *under his feet* till he falls *into them.*

Having thus endeavour'd to ſhew what is the Grace of *Spiritual Humility*, and how *excellent* and highly *beneficial* a Grace it is, and how *vile* and *miſchievous* the contrary *Vice* is, deſtructive of all Religion, and hateful both to God and Man; I proceed now in the *Laſt* Place to ſhew, how highly this Vertue ſhall be *rewarded*; which is expreſt thus in the Cloſe of this Parable, *He that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted.*

That is, in ſhort, Mens *Humbleneſs of Mind* in point of *Vertue*, their *Self-Annihilation*, and returning all the Glory of their Good Actions to God, as the *Author* of whatever is commendable in them; and without *priding* themſelves in their *preſent* Attainments, preſſing on ſtill to *greater Degrees* of Perfection and Heavenly Life: This ſhall, in the World of Eternal Felicity and Glory, be rewarded with the Impreſſion of a near Reſemblance to that Divine Fountain of Holineſs and Perfection, whom here they acknowledg'd to be the Giver of every *good and perfect gift*. They ſhall then *ſee him as he is*, and they ſhall *be like him*; No Failures, no Slips or Imperfections, no Avocations from the happy Employment of Admiring and Loving God, ſhall be *There*, which in *this* Life are the perpetual Clogs and Vexations of a Holy Soul; but with their Faculties

culties *free* and *vigorous*, they shall *fully* enjoy this *supreme Good*, without *Interruption*, to all *Eternity*. This is that which makes a Heaven; this is to enjoy the Happiness of God *himself*; and this Heaven and this Happiness shall be the Portion of the *poor in Spirit*, who here ascribe to *God* the Praise and Glory of their *vertuous* Actions.

And their Humbling themselves before his Majesty, in a deep Sense of the Vileness and Ingratitude of their *Sins* (which the best Man living is not wholly without) shall be rewarded with the *Pardon* of them; they shall be lifted up from their Prostration at the *Feet* of their God and Saviour, and be received into his *Bosom*; and Joy, *extraordinary Joy*, shall be in Heaven in the Presence of the Holy Angels for their Repentance. They shall be exalted from the State of *Penitents* to that of *Friends*, nay *Sons* of *God*, and all Tears for the Future shall be for ever wip'd from their Eyes, and they shall participate of the Joy of their Lord from Everlasting to Everlasting. And such an exaltation as this, is, no doubt, an abundant Recompense for all the Pains of spiritual Mortification; and a Repentance *so* rewarded, will never be repented of.

To conclude therefore; If we hope to have a share in that ineffable Felicity which shall be the Reward of this Humility of Spirit we have been discoursing of, we must make it our Endeavour to tread the Path that leads to it:

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We must *humble* our selves before God according to the Measures above described, that he may *exalt us in due time.* And (as without whom we can do no good Thing) we must with all Earnestness and Importunity beg *his* gracious Assistance, who was *meek and lowly in Heart*; that we may follow his Steps, and return him all the Glory of our *pious* Advances, who worketh in us to will and to do of his good Pleasure; and be so duly affected with Shame and Sorrow for our *Wickednesses*, as with the *Publican*, in bitter Remorse, and with sincere Purposes of Amendment, to smite upon our Breasts, and say, *God be merciful to us miserable Sinners.*

The PRAYER.

O Meek and Lowly Jesus, who resistest the Proud, and givest Grace to Humble, and hast plac'd Poverty of Spirit in the Front of thy Beatitudes, as the Foundation and Ground-work of thy Holy Religion; Teach me this excellent Grace, I humbly beseech thee, and grant that I may hate and shun Pride above all Things, as the most dangerous and destructive Vice, which defiles every thing however otherwise commendable and excellent, and naturally tends to the Pit of Destruction. And to allay all vain Tumors that may arise, give me, O Blessed Saviour, a true Sense of the Corruption of my sinful Nature,

Nature, my many heinous Violations of my Duty, my vile Ungratitude to thee, my greatest Benefactor, the great Imperfections of ev'n my best Services, and that whatever I have done that is praise-worthy, is owing to thy gracious Assistance, and that of my self I can do nothing that is good. O may I therefore never arrogate to my self what should be wholly thine, nor despise any Man, like the haughty Pharisee, *who have nothing my self but what I have receiv'd from thee; but in sincere Humility of Spirit return thee all the Glory, saying, after I have done all that I can, I am still an Unprofitable Servant, and have done but what was my Duty to do. And grant, that in an humble Sense of my still great Defects, considering what vast Assistances I have had, I may smite upon my Breast and say with the* Publican, God be merciful to me a miserable Sinner. *Grant this, thou meek and humble Lamb of God, for the sake of thine own Tender Mercies.* Amen *and* Amen.

FINIS.

4: S. 1708